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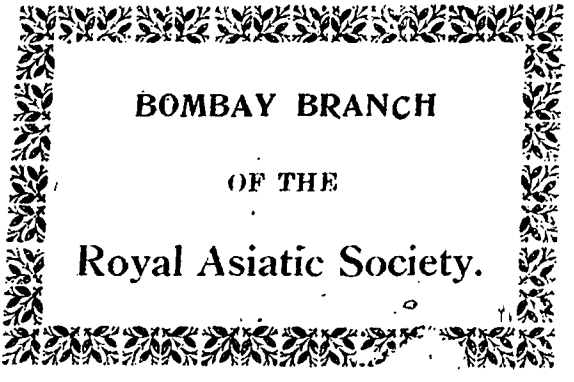

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WAYSIDE PICTURES

THROUGH

FRANCE, BELGIUM, AND HOLLAND.

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ac

BY ROBERT BELL,

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF CANNING," ETC.

AA67

A brook breaks forth into the low-lying land;
Here lies a plain, and there a wood doth stand;
Here pastures, meads, cornfields, a vale do crown,
A castle here shoots up, and there a town.

The Legend of the Duke of Normandy.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY,

Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

1849.

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A LITTLE BOOK FULL OF SWEET MEMORIES—
THE SWEETEST THAT WHICH, LIKE THE UNSEEN LIGHT
WITHIN THE VASE, MAKING ITS HEART SO BRIGHT!
SWIFT TO THE HUES UPON THE SURFACE FLIES,
AND WAKES THEM INTO BEAUTY. IF A SCENE
THROUGHOUT THESE WANDERINGS—SHATTERED TOWERS, DUSK WOODS,
THE HIVES OF MEN, OR WHISPERING SOLITUDES,—
BE TOUCHED WITH INTEREST, 'TIS WHERE THOU HAST BEEN!
THE SLIGHTEST BLOSSOMS, SNATCHED FROM CAVE OR GLEN,
RECALL SOME PLEASANT HOUR, LIKE DISTANT SHRINES
REVIVED IN RELIQUES; SO THESE LEAVES OUR LINES
OF HAPPY TRAVEL MAY BRING BACK AGAIN.
WORTHLESS THE OFFERING ELSE, SAVE FOR ITS FREIGHT
OF LOVE—LOVE WHICH TO THEE I CONSECRATE.

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FRANCE

WAYSIDE PICTURES.

I.

FROM SHORE TO SHORE.

I SHALL take the reader at once on board a steamer lying under the shadow of the Southampton Pier. He has read too many books of travels, or travelled too much himself, not to feel that all preliminary matter is sheer waste of words.

It is not the first time I have stood upon this great sea-wall of Southampton, nor the second, nor—but we have nothing to do with such memories here, except as a sort of guarantee that we are not dealing solely with first impressions. Nor is our track to be always on the high-roads, or the direct course. We are to take all sorts of zig-zag paths, in and out of woods and glens, by mill-streams, villages, and hill-sides, losing ourselves in all manner of places, but keeping a final point of view, which we shall reach in the end; like a discursive gentleman returning home from a carouse, who betrays a vagrant desire to explore lamp-posts and dark entries, door-knockers, and

the like, yet managing with inscrutable rectitude to get home at last.

Here, then, is the steam-boat into which we must descend. The tossing waters, lapping its dull keel, give us a palpable flavour of the journey we are about to take. This is the first incident, this seething of the foam, and surly gurgle of broken waves, that turns expectation into action. Here the reality begins. The flutter of preparation is over, and the moment you tread the deck, and look back to the firm shore you have just left, you feel as if the breath of the strange distant land were already lifting your hair, and diffusing its elasticity through your limbs. A throb, you hardly know why,—a little bustle down into the *salon* and up again, for no conceivable reason but the satisfaction of a fidget—a glance at the passengers as they cluster into knots, full of chatter and excitement, dashed here and there with a little sallow English exclusiveness—a rapid survey of the faces that are crowded upon the platform above you—the engine shrieks—the paddles beat with tumultuous energy, and in a moment more the steamer sweeps into the Southampton Water.

Away past the Isle of Wight, whose "trim gardens" are fading into a heap of mist in the deepening twilight; —and now we are fairly "out at sea." The tourist is conscious of a slight sensation when his eye ranges for the first time over that expanse of ocean and sky, the land gone down behind the horizon, and not a trace of human life left upon the surface save specks of ships, scattered, and hardly distinguishable, in the distance. But the wonder soon ceases, so rapidly does the mind adapt itself to the phenomena of nature.

It was raining when we started, a violent, tempestuous rain: and now we are in the midst of a storm. I never knew it otherwise in this passage from Southampton to Havre. There are people who insist upon fancying that they have made this passage when the sea was "as smooth as a pond." Nautical delusions can no longer surprise or deceive the world. You will find scores of sailors who are ready to swear that they have exchanged signals with the Flying Dutchman.

It was early in the month of August. We supposed that we had anticipated the fury of the equinoctial gales; although I have a strong suspicion that out at sea they last the whole year round. How that may be I will not venture to speculate; but, certain it is, that I never but once before heard such a dialogue between the howling tempest and the hooting, whistling, screeching steam as smote my brain upon this occasion. This sort of elemental *scena* on a dark night, while the vessel is pitching like a cork on the surge, conjures up a phantasmagoria of terrible images in the bewildered imagination of a landsman. Fortunately, the good ship was a noble piece of architecture, with spacious cabins, and wood-work as firm as if her timbers had their roots still buried in their native forests. But the consciousness of safety goes a short way to reconcile us to the groaning sounds that every moment send their dismal wail through the length and breadth of the boat. The crackling of the planks, as if they were cinnamon shavings—the long-drawn wheeze of the bulk-heads as the storm yells past—the shivering, and thumping, and scraping of the keel, as if the vessel were grating against rocks, or dragging through sand-

banks—and the horrid pulsation and hysterical shudders which agitate every fibre of the great labouring creature to its centre, affect you in a way which no reasoning process can wholly overcome, especially if you happen to suffer under a malady which must be left nameless, since no name can adequately describe its horrors.

The captain of the vessel, a small, thin, grisly man, repeatedly assured us that it was a remarkably fine passage, and, by way of illustrating its soothing influence, went fast asleep upon a sofa, while the vessel was undergoing these fearful spasms. He was used to it, and rather liked it. He had commanded the same vessel for ten years in these waters, and knew well the capabilities of both. He lived, like a curlew, in a perpetual high wind, and a few roars of the tempest, more or less, made no perceptible difference to him. It was not pleasant to look at the frosty old man, stretched out in a dream, without a twitch on his face, and to see the passengers clinging to whatever they could grasp to keep themselves steady, and hardly daring to look at each other, lest anybody should ask a question, and expect an answer to it. But we had our revenge upon the captain. The ship gave a sudden lurch in the middle of the night, and pitched him out head-foremost into the floor of the cabin. This was a miserable bit of satisfaction for the fiction he had attempted to impose upon us; but, to our infinite mortification, it had no more effect upon him than upon the cushion of the sofa which rolled over him where he tumbled. The obstinate wretch merely shook himself, rubbed his eyes (hardly that), and went to sleep again.

Quaint and original characters will frequently be found

amongst that seafaring class which lives from shore to shore, in one monotonous voyage of life, unvaried in its oscillating sameness by the events which stir the fluctuating passions of society ashore. Our captain was an example of the superstition and prejudice which sometimes eat into the mind of a man who swings to and fro in this dreary track of existence. Here he had been for ten years passing from Southampton to Havre, and back again from Havre to Southampton, the better moiety of his land experiences being snatched up at Havre; thrown into constant intercourse, such as it was, with the natives of both countries, and exercising a kind of social mediation in their mutual interchanges of pleasure and profit Yet this little parched, obdurate man hated the French with a most comical malignity. Every day that he crossed over to Havre his hatred increased, and he never came within sight of the coast without falling into a furious passion. Throughout the voyage he was gloomy and taciturn, like one who was brooding over a wrong; but the moment the French shore became visible a demoniac activity seemed to seize upon him, and, flushed with an access of national fury, he gave vent to his patriotism in volleys of oaths. The most amusing part in the strange freaks which now took place upon deck was acted by the stewardess, whom he had completely infected with the same fierce antipathy, and who, glorying in his monomania, followed him about like a chorus, exasperating his frenzy, and explaining to the passengers what a true Englishman he was, to hate the French so thoroughly after so long an intercourse with them!

In the midst of the objurgations of the captain and the

stewardess, and in spite of them, the steamer quietly rounded the point of land, and dropped into the basin of Havre.

The first objects that attract the eye on approaching the pier, are the mountains of bales of cotton that are piled up, Alp above Alp, on the quay. There is nothing else to be seen. They blot out the houses and the shipping. The tower of Francis I., which looks down upon the city, seems to have been erected for no other purpose than to keep watch and ward over this grand article of merchandise. As you advance towards the docks, and begin to understand the place, the peculiarity becomes intelligible. Havre is all cotton, except so much of it as is taken up with oil. Cotton and oil are the staple goods of Havre. The town might be admirably represented by a huge wick of cotton twist floating in a reservoir of oil.

Hastening dizzily from the steamer, a new land-interest springs up in the busy thoughts of the tourist, from his desire to secure the best hotel. This is a point of considerable perplexity at Havre. There is certainly no town of equal importance so ill-provided with accommodation. The best hotels are the Hotel l'Amirauté and the Hotel de l'Europe. There are some English hotels, particularly Wheeler's, the London Hotel, and an American house called the United States Hotel, but they are as abominable as flurry and filth can render them. Even the best can be tolerated only because there are no better. It is difficult to comprehend why a town carrying on so extensive a trade should be so wretchedly furnished with hotels. But, perhaps, the very trade of the place supplies

the reason. People stop at these houses for a night, and are gone the next day—passing through Havre into the interior, or on their route home, and full of impatience both ways. Nobody ever thinks of remaining an hour in Havre, unless detained there by business. The hotel-keepers are well aware of the nature of their tenure, and do not think it worth while to incur much expenditure in the way of embellishments for birds of passage. Their houses are mere thoroughfares, and finery in their chambers would soon be trampled out. Sufficient and substantial accommodation is all that is looked for or needed; and such was the pressure for room when we applied at l'Amirauté, that the landlady was busily occupied in preparing beds on chairs and sofas for travellers who had arrived late. We had some reason to congratulate ourselves, therefore, in having been able to appropriate three airy apartments, the only objection to which was, that they were perched up three stories high. Perhaps, after all, that was not so serious an objection on the odoriferous quay of Havre.

Our initial experience at this hotel was not very favourable to the repose so essential after a turbulent passage. Immediately upon leaving the packet, with one's head still swimming, and stomach jaded and aching, to come upon a *déjeûner* in the *salle à manger*, and witness the lusty operations of a vigorous, land-travelled, and vociferous French party over their breakfast is enough to bring back the sea-malady. This was our luck, for our apartments not being yet ready for our reception, we were compelled to breakfast in the public room. There, at a table, sat a party of four great Frenchwomen, and

a little boy, exulting in florid plaid dresses, with flashing eyes and peachy cheeks, tinging the rich saffron background with gushes of ruddy health—there they sat at breakfast, eating, drinking, laughing, and screaming all together with indescribable volubility. It was a striking sight upon first landing from England—staid, decorous, conventional England—to come suddenly upon such a party in a public room, four ladies, without a gentleman, ordering the waiters with a loud confidence that defied criticism, and feasting away at the top of their animal spirits. Of course that was only the first image which involuntarily forced itself upon us, to be displaced by a moment's reflection; since the universality of such usages may be accepted as evidence of a more advanced stage of civilisation than exists in England in reference to the conduct of women—little as we are disposed to exchange our retreating manners for this boisterous fearlessness. But after settling that point with our conscience we have still to reconcile ourselves to the breakfast. Tea and coffee, and *pain à discrétion* would be well enough, with a dozen or so of eggs. But in addition to these light matters, our French party revelled over a banquet of soup, a variety of roasts and *ragoûts*, and sundry bottles of wine, the whole concluding with an ample dessert of fruit. Regarding this formidable array of dishes as a regular French breakfast, there was nothing at all remarkable in it; but it had a disastrous effect upon our nerves as we caught slanting glimpses of the riotous feeders while we dawdled over our cup of tea.

II.

HAVRE.

Havre has a terrible air of business. You feel this at once. The moment you land you are coiled up in ropes, and casks, and trucks, and porters, and cranes, and the bustle of the Custom House. The life of Havre is on its quays and its docks. There is no relief or escape from the din and clatter. If you attempt to get into the streets, it is still the same thing. The Custom House and the port pursue you wherever you move. The docks stretch up into the centre of the whole, to the residences, and even to the country houses of the merchants, whose affairs are thus brought literally to their very doors. This eternal presence of the machinery of business, thrust into the windows of domestic life, cannot make a trade, but what wonderful facilities it offers to a trade in progress, or already made!

There never was anything so preposterous as to build fortified walls round such a town, which is not only a sea-port of great traffic, but the greatest sea-port—the Liverpool—of France. The error has been gradually rectifying itself, as might have been expected, practical necessity rebuking the short-sightedness of old theories. As the population increased, and encamped in the open

country, carrying out the town beyond its prescribed limits, the walls have been taken down, and the enclosure enlarged. But the new walls are as great an impediment as the old, and have been again in the same manner out-grown by the population. Here then is a great commercial city, with its heart shut in by a waste circumjacent ring, while its members are cast sprawling outside. To build a wall round a place of business, whose gates are jealously closed and sentinelled at a certain hour every night, and to say to Commerce, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther," might have answered the purpose in an age when storehouses were little better than depôts for stolen goods; but in this age, when we are loosening the fetters of industry, and cultivating freedom of intercourse over the civilised world, such a restriction is not only absurd, but must ultimately prove to be impracticable. These fortifications and the mercantile spirit they enclose are antagonist principles, and cannot subsist together. The government of France might as well issue an edict to stop all the clocks and watches in the kingdom at a particular moment every day, for the purpose of regulating the sun, as build fortifications to restrain the free action of industry. All such hindrances must vanish as knowledge makes head against ignorance, and discovers to us surer safeguards than bastions and dykes. The passport system is a similar contradiction to the spirit of the age, and cannot, even as a source of revenue, continue to co-exist with railroads and steam-packets.

When the fortifications of Havre were originally constructed, it is only historical justice to admit that it never entered into the imperial contemplation that the town

should acquire commercial importance. The place was then a mere naked coast, sprinkled over with a few fishermen's huts. The whole trade of the spot consisted of the spoils of the sea, which were carried to the great lords up the Seine, who exercised a right of seignory over all the fish that was caught in this neighbourhood. Francis I. built the fortifications as a protection against the English. Sundry changes have taken place in the size and plan of the town since that time; yet, notwithstanding all the attempts which have been made to adapt it to the wants of the people, it is as inconvenient for the purposes of business as ever.

And to this circumstance of continual alterations, of taking down and building up, and seeking within such circumscribed bounds to accommodate the demands of an increasing trade, is to be ascribed the marked discordance that strikes us at the first view of the town between fact and tradition. The streets, the quays, the docks, the pier present the flattest and most prosaic aspect of present and urgent utility. Yet three centuries have elapsed since the city was founded. There is not a vestige of antiquity visible in Havre. Modern necessity has dug up its history. Francis I. intended it for a fortress-town to be called after himself Françoisville; it afterwards became a sea-port under the name of Nôtre Dame de Grace; and finally, casting off even that scrap of tradition, it grew into a great cotton-mart, with the more appropriate title of Havre-de-grace.

The Babel of languages which tortures your ears on the quays of Havre betray in a moment the motley gatherings that are drawn to the place from all parts of

the globe. It is from this point most of the German emigrants take their departure for the new world, and crowds of them are constantly to be found dancing and drinking in the vessels alongside, or wandering about amongst the numerous slop-shops which subsist by the frauds they commit upon these unfortunate outcasts. The German character does not improve under this aspect of emigration; for although the German makes an excellent settler, when he is fairly established in his location, his progress to it is frequently marked by extreme folly and recklessness, partly attributable to his poignant sorrow at leaving his fatherland, and partly to his simplicity and ignorance of mankind.

In a town so utterly given up to the crush of business in its actual manual details, society cannot be expected to discover many graceful or attractive features. In its most intimate intercourse it betrays restraints and shortcomings. There are, in fact, no classes here to make up a society, with the contrasts and collisions requisite to impart colour and vivacity to its reunions. There is but one class in Havre—the merchants; and living as they do in the thick atmosphere of pitch and oakum, and oil and cotton, absorbed from morning till night in freights and cargoes, the drawing-room is little else than the counting-house with the desks locked up, and the ledgers and inkstands merely put out of sight. The clerks appear deferentially on these occasions, but can hardly be said to "assist" at them. As it is in all limited communities, a certain ambiguous barrier divides the principals from the *employés*, so that the young men are kept at a well-understood distance, and the ladies are denied the meagre

satisfaction of enjoying the "bald chat" of the only persons in the town who, in point of age and expectations, might be supposed to interest their attention. A *soirée* in Havre is the dullest of all possible assemblies; the gentlemen collecting themselves into mercantile committees in one part of the room, while the ladies, according to a recent authority, sit at a table, and make believe to be working at a piece of embroidery. Yet as flowers contrive to grow into beauty in the most ungenial places, the ladies of Havre are distinguished for their charms, and deserve a happier fate. One ought always to say such things conscientiously and gratefully.

The out-door life is as dreary as the in-door. There is an attempt at a fine street, with flaunting shops in it; but the lively saunterer, dressed like a rainbow, humming a gay air and twirling his cane, is nowhere to be seen. Ladies are equally scarce on the promenade. The *bien gantée, bien coiffée, bien chaussée,* has no existence in Havre. Everybody is occupied, and ill-dressed, and hurrying on about his affairs. A stranger who takes refuge at a *table d'hôte* finds himself in the same sort of company, and gets a villanous dinner into the bargain. The *cafés* are worse. Do not be deceived by the blaze of lights, reflected in handsome mirrors, and shining down upon rows of little marble tables; the moment you enter you are choked with the fumes of cigars, the heavy aroma of *ponch,* and a compound stench distilled from an ingenious combination of all the offensive essences of a close, densely-packed sea-port town. The luxury of repose is out of the question here. The people have no leisure; they cannot snatch an interval of ten minutes out of the four-and-twenty

hours to cultivate a solitary grace or refinement to embellish or relieve their lives. There is not a single reading-room in the town. And they seem to have as little zest for social as for intellectual pleasures; always excepting the lower orders, in whom everywhere resides the eager desire to escape from toil, and indulge in festivity when they can. A curious proof of the indifference of the Havraise to the enjoyments which in all other parts of the country are essential to the existence of Frenchmen, is supplied by the fate of a speculation undertaken outside the barrier, and just beyond the tower of Francis I., on the margin of the sea. This is a building of considerable magnitude, called Frascati, comprising the attractions of an hotel and a lodging-house, and furnished with baths, and all the other *agrémens* of a suburban retreat. The establishment is built of wood, painted a fiery red, picked out with white, presenting a preposterously garish *façade* to the sea. The building cost the proprietor an enormous sum, and ruined him. It was sold for less than a third of the cost. The fact is a practical commentary on all such matters in Havre. The notion of creating a fashion, or getting the stamp of fashion upon any experiment addressed to the taste of the people, is a delusion. Mere luxury, or style, is a superfluity for which nobody would pay a centime. Such a state of society existing in a country where invention is racked for the supply of fantastic luxuries, and where every-day life is more like a masque than a reality, may reasonably be regarded with surprise. The French character is marvellously flattened in Havre.

There are absolutely no amusements in the place, no resources even for idlers beyond the *restaurant*, and the eternal game of dominoes. The lazy delight which the mercurial Frenchman takes in that same game of dominoes, over which he sits for hours with such ludicrous gravity, is a great paradox in a small way.

Madlle. Rachel stopped in Havre for a few days, and was invited to appear at the theatre, but indignantly refused. She is said to regard the Havraise with contempt, and, considering the eminence in her art from which she looks down upon them, there is reason to apprehend that she does them no great injustice. The entertainments at the theatre usually consist of mongrel dramas, *vaudevilles*, and flimsy operas. Tragedy and comedy are quite out of the way of the audiences, chiefly composed of seafaring people, sailors, brokers, and clerks from the counting-houses. The theatrical taste of the town is something rather worse than low and uneducated. A gentleman who had resided here for a short time, and who wished to show some little attention to the younger members of a family at whose house he visited, took a box at the theatre, and invited his friends. Of course he was entirely ignorant of the nature of the entertainments. As the play advanced, it soon became evident that it was impossible for the ladies to remain. The plot developed the love of a father for his own daughter. There was no mistake or mystery in the matter. Everything was clear and obvious. As the father advanced in the progress of the scene, the ground was closed up behind him, step by step; and to increase the appalling depravity of the design,

it was contrived that the wife and mother should suspect the revolting *liaison,* deliberately watch its course, and finally detect it. Great was the consternation of the inviter and the invited; some excuse luckily came to the rescue, and before the plot had reached its climax the party made their escape from the house.

III.

UP THE SEINE.

THE sweep into the picturesque Seine out of the broad sea-waters is a welcome relief from the pent-up drudgeries of Havre. The freshness of the river air, and the calm pleasant scenery that rises on its margins as you ascend the stream, have a refreshing effect after the stifling turmoil of that prosperous den of commerce.

The Seine is dotted all over with traditions; in this respect it resembles the Rhine, but the traditions are of a different order. There is very little mediæval romance in them; you never come upon the ruined castles of great land pirates, mouldering in a legendary atmosphere of love and rapine; the chivalry of the Seine is of a more respectable class. We have here to do with knights who won their spurs in legitimate fields, and who, in spite of the vicissitudes of civil and foreign wars, transmitted honourable names to their posterity. The knightly traditions of the Seine belong to the camp and the court, and derive little dramatic variety from the *oubliette* and the *donjon*. But the Tancarvilles, the De Meluns, and the Longuevilles, are not the persons who make the principal figure in the legends of the Seine. In this region the monastery reigns paramount over the château.

After passing Honfleur on the left bank—a pretty dash of white houses in the lap of the hills, which exults in one great memory, that William the Conqueror passed a few days here a short time before his death—the next point of interest is the abbey of Grestain, where the said Conqueror was born. A small village is seen here; the abbey itself has been long since swept away. Even in their dust the monks exercise an ascendancy all along this river over the whole train of kings and warriors who, from century to century, left their banners or bones amongst its crags. We have the earliest glimpse of this power in the popular traditions about this abbey of Grestain, which owes its local fame not to the birth of the Conqueror, or the tomb of his mother who was buried here, but to the fact of having possessed the richest larder in Normandy. The monks lived gloriously in this abbey; they had fountains for fattening fish, and a long gallery for keeping their meat cool, and a thousand contrivances to improve the means and sustain the zest of good living. Their memory is accordingly embalmed in the profoundest reverence in these valleys; and, as we get higher and higher up the river, the influence which they wielded in the country becomes more and more obvious. We have traces of them at every step; the number of monastic remains scattered about among the hills, and bleaching at the brink of the stream, attest the extent to which they spead themselves over the soil. The entire district was a camp of monks, living upon the fat of the land, and drawing around them a large population wherever they went. But all that is gone by; their houses are now in ruins, and there is not a monk to be seen. If something has been gained in more

directions than one by the extinction of a class of great idle feeders, the peasantry at least must have missed their bounties. If there was excess in the refectory, there was a set-off in some sort against it in the hospitality at the gate.

The castle of San Kerville is a striking object, pitched on a bold ledge of rock in a gorge of the mountains. Lebrun shut himself up here in the "Eagle" tower, where he composed two of his tragedies, the most memorable incident in its history. The legend attached to the castle falls so short of the interest inspired by the ruin itself, that it is a pity, having no better, it should have any legend at all.

Tancarville—a huge pile yawning out of the depths of a forest at the foot of the mountains—makes a formidable contrast to the strong eyrie of San Kerville. Except, however, that the castle is a structure of vast magnitude, placed in a picturesque position, it presents no other attractions to repay the curiosity of the visitor. A. M. Deville has been at great pains to compile a history of Tancarville, but, with all his zeal, he was unable to extract the slightest romantic interest out of its archives.

The castle appears to have been a stronghold throughout the wars that agitated the country from the beginning of the twelfth century. It passed successively through the hands of the Tancarvilles, the De Meluns, the Longuevilles, and the De Harcourts, and, after many vicissitudes, came at last into the plebeian hands of one John Law, a *financier*. Castlenau, the author of the memoir, and also the confidant, of Marie Stuart, was appointed commandant of the fortress by Catharine de Medicis, in 1563; a little fact in the

history of the place which has been seized upon by the young French poets, who go about the woods here invoking the shade of that unfortunate princess, as if she had actually inhabited these shattered towers in the flesh. In the drama of Marie Stuart, the lady is made to exclaim:

> Vois-tu cet horizon qui se prolonge immense ?
> C'est là qu'est mon pays ; là l'Ecosse commence.
> Ces nuages errants qui traversent le ciel
> Peut-être hier ont vu mon palais paternel.
> Ils descendent du nord ; ils volent vers la France.
> Oh ! saluez le lieu de mon heureuse enfance !
> Saluez ces doux bords qui me furent si chers !
> Hélas ! en liberté vous traversez les airs !

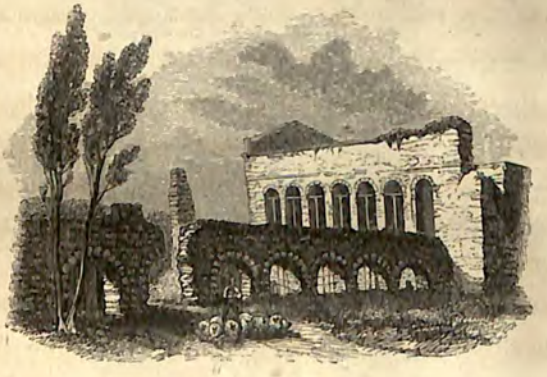
Thus, for lack of more effective traditions, the poets commit a forgery upon the archives. Yet they might have found an available subject for a song or a ballad in the legend of the Lion's Tower, called by the country people *la tour de Diable*. This is the only bit of the marvellous which the most industrious of the Tancarville chroniclers has been able to exhume. There is a little *cachot souterrain* under the tower, in which the devil is said to have taken up his residence, very much to the horror and scandal of the pious neighbourhood. A grand procession, with cross and banners, was got up to expel him. Holy water, and other powerful agencies, were resorted to on the occasion. When the procession approached the tower, the good people, who had marched bravely up to this point, halted all of a sudden, not out of fear, of course, but to make room for the priest to proceed. The holy man advanced alone into the tower, crossing himself three times, in the midst of the most solemn silence; and, after a few minutes, he returned, and announced to the people, with

an air of triumph, that he had seen the devil, that he had exorcised him, and ordered him on the instant to quit the premises; and that the devil had at last slunk away, but not without making a horrible grimace, which showed how reluctant he was to depart. Whoever, therefore, chooses to descend into the *cachot* now need have no apprehensions of meeting its satanic inmate.

Law conceived the design of converting the château into a manufactory, and, unable to accomplish his plans, was obliged to leave France. The ancient *manoir* thus reverted to the Montmorency family, and is now in the possession of the descendants of Madame de Montmorency-Fosseux, who died in 1828.

Quillebeuff, noticeable chiefly for its shifting sands, so dangerous to navigators, is a village whose ambiguous aspect presents a curious intermixture of comfort and decay. It is partly falling to pieces, partly sitting in the sun with a solid and bright serenity, and all huddled up into an incongruous whole. The details would make a strange picture, but nobody would care to approach much nearer to the reality. Your attention is next challenged on the opposite side by a Roman town buried in a mass of foliage—the Juliobona or Julia Bonna of the Romans, now called Lillebonne. It was founded by Augustus Cæsar, and named in honour of his daughter Julia; and an amphitheatre, which was discovered here not many years ago, seems to indicate that it was formerly a place of some importance. William the Conqueror (the haunting genius of these scenes) built a palace at Lillebonne, in which he frequently resided. The pedestrian who finds himself wandering in the woods hereabouts would do well to visit the

Château de Lillebonne, or, as it is more commonly called, the Chateau d'Harcourt. It is one of the most remarkable monuments of the kind in Normandy; the interior consists of a great court surrounded by numerous *salons* in



ruins, the remains of a drawbridge spanning the fosse, a stone staircase, a lofty tower, and a keep, from the summit of which the pastoral valley of Lillebonne may be seen to great advantage. At this point of the river there is a perilous bar, caused by the driving back of the waters of the Seine by the tide. The danger is not exaggerated by the caution with which the practised mariner approaches the spot.

This is the incident to which the name of the river is so prettily traced in one of St. Pierre's prose idylls. He tells us that Seine, a nymph of Ceres, and daughter of Bacchus, having been in attendance on the goddess in her search after Proserpine, begged that these charming meadows might be bestowed upon her; a request which was granted, with the power to make corn and fruit grow wherever she trod. She accordingly took possession of the country,

and the nymph Heve was specially charged with her guardianship, that she might protect her against the advances of her dangerous neighbour, the god of the sea. Seine was one day very innocently amusing herself on the beach, and sporting with the waves, when Heve caught a glimpse of the white hair, dark face, and azure mantle of Neptune advancing among the billows. She immediately warned Seine of her danger; but it was too late. Neptune urged forward his sea-horses, and caught the fair creature as she was endeavouring to escape into the meadows. Seine called for help upon Bacchus and Ceres, who immediately interposed, and the moment Neptune seized her, she dissolved into that river which now flows through the meadows in which the nymph loved to disport herself. But notwithstanding this metamorphosis, by which it might be supposed she had effectually evaded her impetuous lover, Neptune still continues to chase her, and she to fly from his dripping arms. Twice a day he comes panting and roaring up to this spot, and each time Seine retreats to take refuge in her meads, the stream rushing back wildly towards its source, in utter disregard of the natural laws by which the course of rivers is usually governed.

The approach of the sea-waters at flood-tide produces a tremendous effect at this place. The surface of the river is lifted and scattered into the air, and the consternation of the collision supplies a picturesque image of the terror of the nymph, in her struggles to get away from the stormy embraces of her pursuer.

The navigation of the Seine is a service of some danger, arising from the shifting of the sand-banks, and the

inequalities of the bed through which the current flows. In some places the river becomes suddenly narrowed between ridges of hills, and in others it expands as suddenly into a broad lake. At Quillebeuff it forms an extensive bay, and such are the perils of the passage at this place, that a mole has been run out into the river, terminating with a light-house, to guide the course of the nocturnal mariner. At the very entrance to the river, on a height above Honfleur, we are warned of the difficulties we have to encounter by a tall tree, with a naked branch stretched out, like the arm of a pilot, to point the track of safety to approaching vessels. This tree is called *Le bon-homme Richard,* and the legend attached to it informs us that on that spot, which commands the sea-board, a fisherman used to stand to make signs to the ships as they sailed into the mouth of the Seine, and that, falling dead there one day, the tree miraculously sprung up in his place. The good fisherman was canonised, and the tree to this day is known by his name.

The town of Caudebec on the right bank aspires to the dignity of a port, with miniature quays, skeleton ware-houses, and a *grille* or two which are intended to look like municipal barriers. But the maritime transactions of Caudebec for a whole twelvemonth might be effected in a couple of hours in a dark corner of one of the counting-houses of Havre. The quay is a commercial delusion, available only as a promenade for the enjoyment of a very charming view across the river. The town is prettily situated, forming an amphitheatre of houses dipping into the water at the base of a hill richly wooded to the summits. The cathedral, whose filligree spire may be seen

shooting up far above the houses in the middle of the valley, is an exquisite specimen of Gothic architecture. Notwithstanding its present decadence in the way of traffic, Caudebec was once a place of some consequence; the remains of its ancient walls flanked by towers, said to have been erected so far back as the ninth century, are still referred to as proofs of its early strength and power. In the fifteenth century it held out for six months against the English, who garrisoned it for thirty years, and then evacuated it. The English are as much mixed up in the history of these Norman towns as the Normans themselves.

The pedestrian who explores the wooded gorges in this neighbourhood will have some advantages over the steam-boat tourist. The scenery about Caudebec is full of enchanting varieties, the road winding through green dells and rocky solitudes, with frequent openings upon rich pastures and terraces of sward fringing the base of the forests. At every turn you come upon a fresh picture; and half up the side of the hill, after you leave Caudebec, is one of the most interesting of the old monastic ruins—the Abbey of St. Wandrille. The chapel was long since demolished for the value of its materials, by some Vandal who bought the place at the time of the Revolution; but the monastery, said to have been founded in the seventh century, still remains, shut in on all sides by woods. The situation was admirably chosen for the purposes of study and seclusion, to which the first abbot dedicated his life. St. Wandrille accumulated a large library here, and sent forth from his scholastic retreat some of the most learned ecclesiastics of that age.

The château of La Maillerie on the opposite shore is, perhaps, the most perfect specimen of the true French style to be found even in Normandy, so famous for its châteaux. The formal green walks, with the clipped trees overhead, and the smooth lawns buttoned up with vases, the straight lines, and alleys, and statues, and the mathematical precision with which the angles and sides are made to correspond with each other, carry this method of laying out ornamental grounds to the last extremity. The prim beauty produced by the regularity of these arrangements has a peculiarly fantastic effect. We naturally look for a touch of artificial sentiment in such a scene, in the shape of an inscription, or a group to represent some event in the family history, or something that shall fairly publish to the spectator the egotism of a meretricious taste. And we have it here at the termination of the lawn. It appears that the Duchess de Berri breakfasted at the château in 1824, and in commemoration of that remarkable circumstance the proprietor has erected a marble pillar, on which the fact is duly registered. Yet he might have discovered a better excuse for frippery of this sort in the antecedents of the château, if it be true, as it is said, that the Duchess de la Vallière was one of its former inhabitants.

The broken walls of the ancient abbey of Jumièges gleam mournfully through the trees, higher up on the right bank. The sight is interesting, from the remarkable splendour of the architecture, of which nothing now remains but a mass of ruins, and the memory of its connection with the history of the beautiful Agnes Sorel. She died at this place. Her heart is buried here, her body at Loches.

ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY BOMBAY BRANCH

Close in the neighbourhood, at a little village called Menil-sous-Jumiège, they show you a small gothic house, where, according to the tradition, she lived while her royal lover was at the abbey; and they even point out the

stone sill of a window on which she used to lean of an evening, as she looked out to watch for his coming.

Nearer to Rouen, the famous Madame du Bocage, the "tenth muse," so grossly ridiculed by Voltaire, lived at la Vacherie, a small wooden house on the verge of a meadow, at the foot of the castle of Robert le Diable.

The interest associated with the recollection of Madame du Bocage is absorbed at once by the name of the remarkable profligate, who is supposed to have carried on his mysterious orgies in the château, whose ruins may yet be seen on the top of the mountain. The peasants in the surrounding districts firmly believe in the stories which have descended to them through the Norman chronicles, concerning the human fiend who dwelt there. But who

he was, or what he was, or whence he came, are questions which it is idle to discuss. The chronicles give us a minute account of his life,—how he beat his companions at school, and killed his school-master with a knife, and how he broke into a convent at Rouen, and destroyed all the nuns, with a multitude of equally monstrous exploits. All reliable authorities repudiate these fables, which are unsupported by a single shred of historical evidence. It is a curious fact, that there is nothing whatever known about the history of the château, except that it was deliberately demolished at the time when Philip Augustus reunited Normandy with France. The ruins are a shapeless mass of loose stones; but the view from the height is worth the labour of climbing up to it.

Amongst the conspicuous features in the diversified scenery of the Seine, one is struck everywhere with the rich growth of poplars. The quantity of these poplars that cast their lofty scant shadows over the river, not merely in straight lines, but in vast plantations, forming endless and innumerable vistas as you sail past, is perfectly incredible. The monks and the poplars appear to have the whole of this picturesque stream to themselves. And connected with these tall, tapering woods, is another singularity, which provokes one's curiosity.

Following the course of the river, up or down, you cannot fail to notice certain straggling solitary huts on the banks — sometimes nestling under the rocks, sometimes half sunk in a marsh or buried in the underwood at the foot of a forest of poplars, and sometimes standing up against the sky like a landmark. You will generally see a man in an odd blue costume, standing sullenly near the

huts; sometimes there are two, sometimes none. These men wear a disconsolate and desolate air, is if they were undergoing some dreadful form of penance. They seem to have no occupation, and they hang about these lonely places as if they had nothing to do but to wander through the marshes, until, like the decaying matter around them, they should become decomposed in due course of time. Occasionally, you may see one of them coming down stealthily through the trees, and popping out his head like a hunter in ambush, watching his opportunity to fire upon a bear: or like a brigand, tracking an unconscious traveller, and waiting the sure moment to pounce upon him. Once or twice you may chance to see a weird woman in the neighbourhood of these strange men, with her arms folded, and her stern eyes fixed upon the water. The more you investigate the matter, the more you are perplexed. There are no signs of domestic life round these huts. They are too small to accommodate the men who hover about them, being sometimes scarcely larger than a sentry-box. There is not a patch of vegetation near them, not a single token of household existence. They are invariably pitched on the most dreary spots, inaccessible to ordinary intercourse. What, then, are these men who lead such gloomy lives? What do they do there in the dark woods, and under the dripping rocks? The mystery resolves itself into a painfully unromantic solution. They are *douaniers*, and their business is to prevent smuggling on the river. Yet they never appear to transact any business of this nature; you rarely see them move. They stand stock still, like the painted soldiers in the gardens at Vauxhall; and their whole existence seems nothing more

than a *tableau vivant.* Boats pass and repass, and they never pretend to see them. The secret is, they know every boat on the river; and when a strange craft happens to come in sight, the *douaniers* spring out of their ambush, and darting upon it ransack its contents from stem to stern. Such is the pleasant life of the *douaniers* of the Seine.

The approach to Rouen is the crowning glory of the river. The evidences of wealth and luxury which now begin to accumulate around you, afford unmistakeable assurance of the close proximity of a great city. The scenery undergoes a striking change. The repose of rocks, and woods, and old slumbering castles, gives way before the vivid movements of a rich population. You are awakening out of a dream into the realities of life. The pulpit of Gargantua, and the other quaint reliques to which a literary or chivalric antiquity have imparted a traditional interest, no longer engage your attention. A world of stirring objects excites your curiosity, and produces a new train of ideas. Bustling villages and handsome châteaux rise in quick succession on both sides. Groups of gay islands, clusters of substantial houses, and numerous private residences, embellished with costliness and taste, form the panorama through which you pass to the broad esplanade of Rouen.

IV.

AN OLD NORMAN CITY.

The appearance of Rouen from the Seine is highly imposing. The grand expanse of quay, which lies between it and the river, throws it back far enough to enable the eye to take in the whole at once, with its fantastical varieties of roof and gable, spires and towers, clustering in charming confusion amongst the dimples of the hills. The spacious quay, which is a grand modern improvement, interferes a little with the old-world tone of the place, it looks so new and fine; but, balancing the advantages of the open view against the provoking interruption of the crumbling and unsightly walls which formerly screened the city, the picturesque is a clear gainer by the change. The situation of Rouen is exactly what the French call *riant*—lying up the sides of a broad valley, backed by a chain of hills, broken into wooded ravines, and looking down upon the pleasant islands of the Seine, and its moving panorama of ships, boats, and streamers of all nations and colours. Never was a spot more happily selected for a great inland city, commanding the sea through a noble river, which can float vessels of two hundred tons burthen to its quays, and possessing, by its position, immediate communication with all parts of

France. On the opposite bank of the river is the suburb of St. Sever, a densely populated place, horribly thronged and dirty in the interior, but making an effective picture across the water. At the extremity of the city, in a deep green dell, the pretty faubourg of Martinville, buried in trees on the border of the Champ de Mars, forms the romantic entrance to the old Paris road.

There are two bridges at Rouen close to each other. *Cui bono?* One is a suspension-bridge, handsomely built, and the other a solid stone structure, ornamented with a bronze statue of Peter Corneille. The necessity of these two bridges is by no means apparent, and the only satisfaction I could obtain on the point was, that they were designed as termini to the two principal streets,—a design which they by no means fulfil.

English travellers have a habit of abusing French towns for their dirt and stench. Rouen has had more than its fair share of this sort of criticism. Miss Costello says that Caen "surpasses all other towns, *except Rouen,* in unpleasing odours and filthy streets." This is rather a hasty verdict. The streets are narrow, and, from that circumstance, not very clean; but they are neither so narrow (except in the old quarters, where we should be sorry to see a foot of their ragged timbers removed) nor so filthy as they are described. Rising against an amphitheatre of hills, there is plenty of room for the sun and air to play upon the streets, and the rapid descent of the rains through these narrow conductors supplies a constant drainage, which offers by no means an indifferent substitute for sewers. The health of the town is still further secured by the streams of the Aubette and the Robec,

which flow through its environs,—a circumstance which appears to have escaped the notice of casual travellers.

But the imagination is so richly feasted in traversing these quaint streets, that one hardly thinks of anything but the wonderful combinations of forms that surprise you at every turn. From whatever point of view you look at the streets of Rouen, they are ready to sit to the artist. The broken lines, the projecting windows, the curious doors and dim interiors, the pendant ornaments that topple out over your head, the strange roofs, eaves, and corbels, and odd mixture of beams, stones, slates, and rubbish, with the dark mystery of antiquity brooding over all, suggest a perpetual succession of pictures. We involuntarily exclaim at every step, "Here is a scene for Prout!" You may repeat this a thousand times without exhausting the wonders of Rouen. And this is one of the pleasures of visiting an old continental city, which cannot be conveyed by any art of description. It *realises* before our eyes all that which had been hitherto little more to us than the dreams of poets and painters, giving us in addition the actual life of the scene, of which we knew nothing beyond its costume.

Rouen has profited more than any other town by the introduction of gas-lights, in consequence of the peculiarity of its architecture. The effect of the lamps at night is very striking, lighting up the irregular masses of buildings, the roofs and upper stories of which almost meet across the narrower streets, and shut in the glare upon the stream of pedestrians below; bringing out into strong relief the single lumbering waggon which nearly fills the whole breadth of the causeway, with its huge horse covered

with leather-housings and sheep-skins, dyed blue or red, fringed with cotton tassels, and a ring of bells round its great neck. The multitude of shadows, and endless diversities of outlines and patches of light produced by the inequalities of the façades, exceed, in their startling variety, all one's previous notions of the architectural romance of an ancient Norman town. The stranger who would enjoy this curious sight in full perfection may be recommended to stand on the quay at the corner of the Rue Grand Pont, where he can get his view according to the angle he chooses; showing the street apparently suspended in the air, and running in a straight line towards the *côte* of Ingouville, with the clear blue sky looking serenely down upon it—or taking an oblique direction, and emptying its flickering lights and shadows into utter darkness.

The impressions you get in these old towns at night may be more vague, but I am not sure, after all, that they are not, upon the whole, more true and characteristic than the literal revelations of daylight. You carry away, at all events, a profounder feeling of the strange style of such places, after exploring them through the uncertain light that falls about you in their mazy recesses; the very shadows help your imagination, and the vagueness itself is an element of wonder and enjoyment. Daylight is excellent for statistics,—excellent, too, for the ulterior business of the artist; but the poetry of the place, and all that imperfect picturesqueness which is so suggestive in its dimness, can only be got at when darkness has fallen over the scene, and given its deep tone to the odd nooks and corners and inner life which the sun lays bare in palpable prose.

One of the most picturesque of all the streets of Rouen is the narrow street full of old houses, called *La Rue de la Grosse Horloge.* It derives its name from the antique clock and gate-house, upwards of three centuries old, which span the centre near the palace, and close to the beffroi, still used for the purposes of the curfew. The view of this street, by day or night, is singularly striking.

Wandering idly at night through the tortuous passages of the town, I found myself in a small square, ignorant that it was the Place de la Pucelle, and that I was standing close to the statue of the Maid of Orleans, and on the very spot where, to the disgrace alike of the English and the French, the fair enthusiast was executed. All around there rose into the air dark and heavy roofs, various in outline, and cutting against the sky in the oddest chaos of forms. As I passed a projecting corner, taking the direction of the quay, my attention was arrested by a vast Gothic arch inserted in a large ambiguous building. For a moment I was startled by the obscurity of the extensive interior, which lay quite open, and which would have been a mass of undistinguishable gloom, but for a single lamp suspended from the roof at a considerable distance within. It threw out just sufficient light, when the eye became accustomed to the darkness, to reveal a remarkable group. There were two horses caparisoned for the road; a girl

occupied a position in front, firmly grasping the head of one of the horses, while with uplifted arm she menaced the other. Farther back, and scarcely discernible, stood a rugged man preparing some rude garments, apparently for the purpose of going abroad, although the night was already far advanced, and close to him a woman watching his motions with eager eyes: the rest of the scene was lost in darkness, even to the walls. My curiosity was excited, I hardly know why, unless it was by the odd association between the great Gothic arch and the curious group within. I examined the building a little closer, and discovered in the side three beautifully mullioned windows, with niches for the Madonna and Child, and an exquisite variety of tracery on the screen that ascended in front of the roof. It was impossible to mistake the original uses of this building—it had evidently been a church. With a view to ascertain whether my conjecture was correct, I entered into conversation with the owner, a woman. She was quite ready to accommodate me with post-horses; they had a capital stud, and carriages also for hire—the place was a stable. It had formerly been the church of St. George. Another church at the opposite corner had been converted partly into a *café*, and partly into a watch-house.

I turned away, musing, as an unenlightened stranger might be supposed to do, upon such a piece of intelligence communicated with indescribable *sang-froid*. A grand and noble tower sprang up before me in the next narrow street through which I passed. It was crusted over with elaborate devices, a perfect fretwork of carving, through which the moonlight played in gushes of silver. It also had

belonged to a church—but what had become of the church now? I groped onward to the base of the tower, and found that it was occupied as a cotton-warehouse. Rouen is crowded with such instances, bedded in the densest parts of the town, and very likely to escape observation. This was the work of the first Revolution. There were then thirty-six churches in Rouen; now, with a population very nearly doubled, there are only fourteen. In the church of St. Ouen they show you to this day the marks in the flooring of the nave where Robespierre set up stands for melting all the lead he could procure into bullets.

No incident in the history of Rouen, of which memorials are yet extant, seizes so forcibly upon the mind of the visitor as this secularisation, or annihilation, of the old churches. This fact—for it is a fact in the driest and most oppressive sense—comes silently and gradually upon you, until at last, by repeated instances, the whole extent of the desecration grows painfully apparent. The profanation of these masterpieces of art, and their degradation to such base uses, appeals pathetically to our admiration of the beautiful and the antique, and to that devotional feeling which, whatever may be our differences of creed, unites us all in the common recognition of a Faith of some sort. The daily contemplation of the sacrilege has rendered the thing a matter of indifference in France. Happy the country where the integrity of the religious sentiment has never been exposed to such deadening experiences!

It is needless to say much about the existing churches of Rouen: the subject has been exhausted by pen and

pencil. The cathedral, as all the world knows, is a marvellous specimen of architecture, covered over with ornaments, and running into excess in the florid character of its embellishments; from which censure, however, the nave must be honourably excepted. The amateur of stained glass will be enchanted with the specimens he will find here, and at the church of St. Vincent. But the tower! —they have erected a cast-metal tower, one hundred and fifty feet in height, to replace the old one which was destroyed by lightning. It looks like an extraordinary experiment in confectionary—like spun sugar running up to a point into the sky. It might harmonise somewhat better with the rest of the building if it were painted stone-colour; but it is impossible by any contrivance to reconcile it to the structure it surmounts. The ascent reckons some five hundred and sixty steps, and it is matter of absolute astonishment that the weight of such a mass of metal does not crush the whole building upon which it is erected. A glance at the exterior of the pile will be sufficient to show that it could bear a still heavier burthen. It is as solid as a rock. The view from this tower of the river and the surrounding country, at such a depth below that a man becomes reduced to the dimensions of a filbert, will abundantly reward the toil of the ascent; but it is fearful work to get up these five hundred and sixty steps. The tower is composed to the top of open iron work, resembling lace at a distance; and while you ascend the wind whistles awfully round you, as it is caught in the numerous loops and forces itself out again. The vibration, real or imaginary, seems to shake the whole fabric, and at every step the fragile threads shiver round you, and you

expect nothing less than that this gigantic piece of filligree will be swept away under your feet.

The most remarkable monument in the cathedral is that of Cardinal d'Amboise and his nephew. The devout calm of the figures, taken in the attitude of prayer, is very truthful; and the elaborate sculpture, partly in alabaster and partly in marble, spread over the surface of the monument, is full of power and variety. In the bas-relief at the back we have St. George in the act of slaying the dragon; in the compartments above, the whole company of the Apostles; and the Cardinal Virtues in a similar series below.

The church of St. Ouen is infinitely grander than the cathedral. Some people doubt this—others are divided. The surprise is that there should exist any doubt on the subject. St. Ouen is, perhaps, the purest specimen in the world of what is called the pointed style, and beyond all comparison more chaste, light, and impressive than the cathedral, where, under the span of the Gothic windows, some one has thrown in a few Ionic pillars, which have a most distracting effect. The windows of St. Ouen are exquisitely rich and delicate. Passing over the well-known features of this church, there is a really fine picture here by Martigny, a modern French artist, 1822. The subject is the Scourging of Christ, and it is brought out without any of the vulgar vices of the modern school. The man at the back with the uplifted lash, spreading his brawny muscles into the darkness to take a more deliberate aim, is admirably conceived. The head of Christ is profoundly beautiful, and radiant with that divine expression of suffering which it is the highest reach of historical art to

attain. The grouping of this picture is chargeable with some slight excesses in the details; but it is cleverly imagined as a whole.

In the new Hôtel de Ville there is a collection of old and new pictures huddled together with execrable taste. I happened to see the exhibition of living artists here, which was much as usual—masses of blue and vermilion and bright yellow—seas of amber, and skies of ultra-marine—and faces such as the artists never saw, and nobody else would ever wish to see. Taken altogether, however, the French painters are improving. That vice which Fuseli calls the "debauchery of colour" is not quite so glaring in their pictures as it used to be; and although, here and there, you get, as usual, a heterogeneous burst of sensual heat, which absorbs form, subject, and expression in its blinding focus, they are beginning slowly to recognise the principle that colour is the medium and not the representative of character and passion. Occasionally, indeed, it seems as if these painters sent their palettes, and not their pictures, to the exhibition.

The Palais de Justice will always be an object of interest in Rouen; the Cour d'Assise is held in the very chamber where the Parliament of Normandy sat; the judge occupies the identical bench which was once filled by the Duke of Normandy in person. How these sights bring old histories back upon us, and renew the life of antiquity before our very eyes! The carved work of the massive oak ceiling in deep relief, and richly picked out with gold, is the same that was put up there in the fifteenth century: the wood has grown black with age.

There are many such things to think about and write about here; but it demands leisure and opportunity, and an overruling of the reluctance with which a tourist retraces ground already so familiar to others. On the other hand, he who runs hastily over these scenes must feel himself losing every hour twenty new images and trains of ideas for one he is able to seize and secure.

Society in Rouen represents all the classes existing in France; it is a reflection of Paris, with a larger infusion of the mercantile spirit. On the promenades you see the fashion of the place poured out as it is in all the great towns, and the gaiety of the out-door life may be accepted as a type of the hilarity and luxury of the in-door reunions. The upper orders exult in costly dinners, and there is no part of France in which the *cuisine* is cultivated with greater skill and outlay. But amidst all this tasteful profusion of the rich, one wonders what sort of life it is that prevails in the weird, little, dizzy houses into which one peeps in scaling the dark streets up the town. How do those people live packed up in such tiny rooms, and clattering about in perpetual activity, like a colony of ants? The images you catch of domestic life through the *chiaroscuro* of these interiors do not certainly impress you with any very favourable opinion of the material prosperity of the inmates; yet the sprightliness of their movements in the dark, the sound of an occasional *chanson*, which now and then breaks upon your ear, and the bright, serious faces which may be seen peeping out of the upper windows, assure you that, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, the inhabitants of Rouen are a contented

race, living miserably enough in dismal workshops on dry bread, thin soup, and Neufchâtel cheese, but contented in their own way, nevertheless.

Something of this may be attributed to their religious enthusiasm. They take refuge against the common ills of life in their consoling superstitions. It helps them to spiritual resources—such as they are—in seasons of adversity, and strengthens them through their penurious toils. In past times Rouen was famous amongst the great towns of France for the special honours paid by the people to the Virgin Mary. She was the patroness of the town, and there was scarcely a house upon which her image, smothered in tinsel, was not displayed. This pervading homage of the Virgin at last acquired for the city the title of *Ville de Sainte Vierge,* which it preserved up to the time of the Revolution, when most of these mural baubles were destroyed. But the fraternity of the Immaculate Conception—a society instituted for the propagation of this particular worship—still survives, and its festival is expressly distinguished as *la fête aux Normands.* The gravity which forms the substratum of the Norman character is impressed upon their religious usages. They are perfectly in earnest in all these matters; their faith does not satisfy itself with processions and masses on saints' days, but penetrates the arcana of their households. There is scarcely one of these dark rooms in which you may not to this hour discover a figure or representation of the Virgin; and it is by no means uncommon to find the special divinity of the town doing humbler duty in various ruder shapes amongst the bedsteads, escritoires, and chairs. The gospel furniture of this quaint old city

might furnish a curious subject for the investigation of an antiquary.

There lingers, also, to this day amongst the people of Rouen something of that pride of power which has descended to them in their traditions; for Rouen once possessed privileges which, although since scattered to the winds by intestine wars, invasions, and revolutions, formerly elevated the city almost to the rank of an independent state. Under the Dukes of Normandy, and even under the Kings of England, the people of Rouen exercised extraordinary rights, which do not appear to have been granted to other cities. The mayor possessed complete control within his jurisdiction, and no citizen of Rouen could be arrested in his *baillage* except by him or through him; and the people had a right of refusing taxes if they pleased, and were exempt from the payment of all duties except the duties on wine; they enjoyed also the right of pasturage in all the domain forests of Normandy, and their goods were toll-free on the Seine, and passed free in like manner through all the royal customs. Nor could any ship sail from France to Ireland (with a single exception), or from Ireland to France, without unloading at their wharves; nor could strange merchants buy or sell in Rouen except through the agency of a citizen, so jealously were their privileges and interests fenced round by arbitrary regulations. It was no wonder that, at last, they carried their ambition to such a height as to elect a king of their own. But he was only the monarch of a nine days' pageant, and was glad enough to escape from the dangerous puppet-show as soon as he could. In spite of the vicissitudes of its history,

Rouen is still a city of considerable political importance. Havre has materially interfered with its commercial advantages, yet it continues to wield a conspicuous influence in the National Assembly.

The literary memories of Rouen are preserved with almost ostentatious reverence. Pierre Corneille divides the honours with the Virgin Mary; and the city that is represented to-day by Thiers boasts of having given birth to the two Corneilles, to Brumoy the translator of the Greek Theatre, to Adam the chemist, Madame du Bocage, and Fontenelle.

It does not appear, however, that these memories have inspired much literary emulation. Rouen has reposed for the last half century on its laurels. It produces no more poets or historians; its genius has latterly run chiefly upon the railroad. There are lecture-halls and reading-rooms in Rouen; but the amusements of the people—with the exception of their marriage-feasts and religious ceremonials—are neither very numerous nor of a very high order.

There is an inferior theatre on the bank of the river, close to the stone bridge, which is worth a visit—not inside, but outside. In front of the building is a small stage, retreating into the walls with a scene painted at the back. Here the actors exhibit a short play before the performances commence within, by way of tempting the spectators with a taste of their quality. Hundreds of people gather of an evening on the extensive quay to witness this humorous prologue, and judging by their frequent roars of laughter, the entertainment is admirably adapted to the audience. I had the curiosity to stay out the whole of one of these preliminary exhibitions, and

although it was rather difficult at such a distance to follow the speakers, I believe I succeeded in catching the subject of the little comedy.

A very comical scamp—a sort of Scapin—is in love with the daughter of a certain rich man; and after many unsuccessful but exceedingly funny attempts upon her heart, he is fortunate enough at last to make an impression. The process by which his final triumph is obtained does not appear very clearly; but matters of this kind must, of course, be taken for granted. The lady makes her escape from paternal bondage and comes to the house of her lover, where, full of the fears natural to such contraband proceedings, he hides her in a closet or cupboard from the wrath of the indignant father. The old gentleman gets a clue to her retreat, and makes his appearance before the house in an awful rage. The audience now expect a terrible scene. The exasperated father, hardly able to contain himself, stamps about in a towering passion, uttering horrible broken words, and flourishing his cane so desperately, that the least you expect is that he will knock down the lover the moment he can get at him. *A la bonne heure!* Out comes the lover, dressed up as a barber, with the usual cap and apron, and full of that flutter and finesse which is always so effective on the French stage. The moment he appears the spectators burst out into acclamations of delight; but their excitement is increased tenfold when the impudent fellow asks the respectable old gentleman if he wants to be shaved. This is the climax of the joke. It is not enough that he should run away with the worthy man's daughter, but he must want to shave him into the bargain.

There is excellent dramatic skill in this, and no slight knowledge of human nature—especially of French human nature. Whenever the dramatist turns the jest against age and its decaying powers, its dreary sense, its blunders, and its dulness, he is sure to succeed. The sympathies of the holiday-world are always with youth, and love, and its delusions—the bright side of things in preference to the dark. This is the secret of the popularity of the pantomime. It is this which gives it so dazzling a charm for the young, and so much attraction even for the old, who like to see their youth reflected and reproduced in its airy and frolicsome round. But, *revenons à nos moutons.*

The old gentleman is astonished, as well he may be, at the effrontery of the lover, and is threatening all manner of revenge, when the rejected suitor, the chosen of the father, a thin, superficial, empty-headed fop, enters. The lover immediately pounces upon him, and wants to shave him too. Another roar from the audience, and another poke in the ribs of the old gentleman. The animal spirits of the lover are in fact irresistible. He holds the stage from first to last. He knocks everybody about, defeats all their schemes, and shows such ingenuity and indomitable activity as to throw his adversaries into despair. His topping vivacity imparts incessant liveliness to one of the slenderest plots imaginable; and it is, therefore, not very surprising to find the father beaten in the end, and, fairly out of breath, giving up all opposition, and the discomfited suitor himself interceding on behalf of his rival, whose restless gaiety and invincible powers of face have completely worn him out. Everything in this little piece depended on the lightness and rapidity of the dialogue and the dexterity of the acting,

which was really capital. The ease of the performers, the tact with which they ran up the jokes to the culminating point, and the buoyancy with which they kept the stage alive throughout, never flagging for an instant, might be imitated with advantage in theatres of higher pretensions.

V.

THE FOREST OF ELBEUF.

LEAVING Rouen by diligence, at half-past six o'clock in the morning, we breakfasted at a ragged village with just enough of slated houses in it to raise a suspicion that it aspired to be brevetted as a town. Here, after paying for the breakfast, and giving a few sous to the attendant, all my French money was exhausted. The girl looked at me with an incredible air of astonishment and demanded more. This was a pity: firstly, because she could not get it; secondly, because she had already received more than she receives from diligence passengers once in a twelvemonth; and thirdly, because she was really a pretty, rosy-featured girl, and the sour looks she rained down upon me, till I effected my escape into the *coupé*, quite spoiled her beauty.

It is one of the penalties of travelling by diligence, that you must eat with the diligence, drink with the diligence, and put up with all the rough, miscellaneous usage of the diligence. Yet in some districts it is not so easy to get on without the help of this same great, commodious, obnoxious diligence. Post-horses in remote places were always scarce, and the spreading invasion of the railroads has not improved the accommodations in this

particular. Nor is the *coupé* so indifferent a resource after all, with a slight exception, of which travellers by *coupés* no doubt entertain a vivid recollection. The *coupé* is generally roomy and airy, with a liberal expanse of cushion, and loops for your arms by which you can sling yourself to sleep. But the thing to be reconciled to is the heap of dust in which your feet are buried. The accumulation of that volatile material on the floor of a *coupé* can be accounted for only on the supposition that the vehicle, in addition to its other functions, is also employed as a dust-cart. The soil deposited by multifarious boots in this aristocratic division of the diligence appears to be preserved with scrupulous care, and forms, in some instances, a stratum of sufficient capacity to grow a small carpet of grass, if the disturbance to which it is exposed did not prohibit vegetation. Yet, with all its drawbacks, the diligence is a conveyance of considerable merit. It opens a complete comedy in little of French life; priests opera-dancers, bagmen, *avocats*, *littérateurs*, artists, farmers, and women of all classes and conditions are found here squeezed up in the stifling interior, or crushed into the *rotonde;* and when it empties its variegated contents at the door of a roadside *auberge*, you have only to observe and listen if you want to pick up a few genuine traits of national character.

The road from Rouen to Caen realises everything one looks for in the way of romantic scenery in Normandy. It is a perfect vision of foliage from beginning to end. After passing two or three insignificant villages, you plunge into the forest of Elbeuf, which, continuing for four miles, buries you in an abyss of trees. The road

undulates perpetually. At one moment you are flying through the depths of a valley, at the next you are toiling over the summit of a hill, but everywhere the forest encloses you. In the course of your journey you get numerous peeps at the river, sometimes close at your feet, sometimes gleaming at a distance through the woods. At Brionne you see it for the last time. The curve of the river at this point is singularly picturesque. You see it silvering off through meadows and trees, until at last it vanishes in a mist of green as your carriage dashes into the precipitous streets of the town.

Once upon a time Brionne was a strong town—a town with massive walls and towers which wore an air of immortal strength. There are yet to be seen the remains of a formidable citadel sprawling in grass and weeds, in which a certain Count Robert, with a little garrison of 600 men, withstood the whole army of the Duke of Normandy. The place could not now withstand an army of bulrushes, and is in such a condition of dilapidation that the wild twigs and bushes growing through the masonry seem to be dragging it to pieces. Once upon a time, too, Brionne was famous for its manufactures, and, strange to say, is said to be at this moment more famous for them than ever. It is a queer place this Brionne. The old narrow streets look as if they were crumbling away before your eyes; and at every gust of wind you expect to see the crazy houses tumble down over one another. And in the midst of this visible decay—this untenantable ruin —there is a rapidly increasing living population engaged from morning till night in weaving, and milling, and handicraft, the loud reverberations of which threaten momently

to bring the town toppling about their ears. Nor are there any signs of enlargement going forward to meet the new exigencies of these devoted artisans, except a few scorched brick huts in the environs, looking very like lime-kilns. What these people are to do by-and-by, when their numbers grow faster and thicker, and the old houses, in the natural course of rot, fall down upon them as they must do, probably all together in one fell swoop, it is hard to conjecture. The revival of trade in such rickety hovels is a matter perfectly incomprehensible; and France is, probably, the only country in the world where people, in bringing back the sources of wealth, could not also contrive to conjure up a little of its comforts.

The next place of consequence is Lisieux, an ancient town built at the mouths of two gorges in the hills, which meet at this spot. The apparition of this large town in so secluded a retreat, full of old houses, old people, and old costumes, startles the traveller. The tall lanky houses, built principally of wood, have an aged and melancholy air, which harmonises with the brown shadows that eternally brood over these gorges; and the pictorial aspect of the place, lying in the depths of this Sleepy Hollow (in which no less than eleven or twelve thousand souls are pent up), is strikingly enhanced by the number of charming little villas, whose white façades flash out on all sides from secluded nooks in the hills. The gaiety of the contrast throws back the dim old town below into still deeper gloom. Lisieux has undergone in its time all the usual varieties of rapine and carnage. It was pillaged by the Normans in the 8th century; sacked and burned by the Bretons in the 12th; taken by Philip-Augustus in the

13th; by the English in the 14th; by the Leaguers in the 16th; and finally seized upon by Henry IV. in 1588. But this is nothing.

Every town you meet in France—particularly in this part of the country—has its history of sieges and confiscations, and it would be quite a relief and a curiosity to fall in with one that had been able to conduct itself peaceably and decently. The wonder is that a vestige of them remains to point the legend of their sackings and burnings. If the local chronicles are to be credited, there is not one of them that has not been re-produced, over and over again, after the manner of the phœnix. It was a sheer waste of gunpowder and battering-rams to reduce these places to ashes, for they were sure to spring into life again with a rejuvenescent activity which must have astonished the enemy. Lisieux itself, ancient as it is, is but the resuscitation of an older city, which, although effectually destroyed, still survives in its wonted fires. On the summits of the hills above these gorges once stood the capital of the Lexovii, which covered a surface of quadruple the extent of the modern city. So far back as the 4th century it was annihilated by the Saxons, who laid the foundations of Lisieux with a part of the *débris*. And thus, in the civic histories, we are led up a genealogy of battles, through whose bloody mire and smoke we are to recognise successive races of builders at work upon all these Norman and Breton cities.

The valleys and wild prairies of Normandy, which spread themselves out before you with such charming versatility of form and hue on this little journey, are

amongst the most fertile regions of Europe. The rich fields of beet-root, wheat, and grass stretching away amongst the hills as far as the eye can reach, the rivers flowing through masses of verdure, and the towering forests that climb up the surrounding heights, and skirt the pastoral landscapes, afford constant evidences of the natural wealth and beauty of the province. The soil teems with vegetation, the air is salubrious, and the earth yields everything that can be required for the luxuries or necessities of life.

From Lisieux to Caen, having started in the morning, we plunge deeper and deeper into the twilight, and by the time we arrive within sight of the city, we can see the sun setting over the spires of St. Etienne, its far-famed cathedral. The different views we get of Caen, as we traverse hill and valley in rapid alternation, are curious and perplexing. Sometimes it is seen perched on the crown of a wooded height, and sometimes it lies in a hollow, but it is always above or below you, and never straight before you on the plain, like other cities. At last we thunder down the suburb streets, till we arrive at the bridge, where the huge diligence being duly weighed, and found not to exceed its legal privilege, crack, crack, crack goes the whip, and we gallop into the Rue St. Jean, after making a break-neck turn with a diligence and four horses, which seems impossible with a cab and one.

The distance from Rouen to Caen is ninety-nine miles, which is performed by the diligence in thirteen-and-a-half hours, averaging about seven-and-a-half miles per hour; as the whole route lies through an irregular country, having frequently to ascend and descend heavy hills, and

rarely knowing the advantage of a level road, the rate may be estimated equal to nine miles an hour, under more favourable circumstances. This diligence travelling is by no means so lingering as the English generally report it to be. In the old times it was, no doubt, tardy enough, but so was the ancient waggon and coach travelling of England. Within the last fifteen years, the diligence and the roads of France have undergone a thorough reform, and will not now suffer in comparison with the few stage-coaches and highways that are yet left in England. The whole road from Paris to Caen is macadamised throughout, with the exception of occasional patches of stone pavement—that most agonising of all tracks for man or horse—between Lisieux and Caen.

VI.

THE STREETS OF CAEN.

THE Hotel d'Angleterre is not the best hotel in Caen, although it is spoken of as the best. It subsists on a *souvenir*, which is industriously made the most of, as an attractive advertisement. Poor Beau Brummell lived here in his latter days, before he was transferred to the neighbouring *maison de santé*, where he died. They tell a great many anecdotes about him, and show you the chamber where he lived. It is a miserable history from beginning to end, that of poor Brummell; and the descent from the fripperies of a court to this wretched exile, and still more wretched death, points the moral of wasted talents (for, with all his folly and vain-gloriousness, Brummell was not deficient in capacity) in a way that hits hard at the vanities of fashion. Latterly, he fell into habits of solitary dissipation, and, they tell you in the hotel, used to drink a bottle of brandy a-day; and thus he destroyed his powers, and became a wreck to be drifted out of sight amongst idiots and madmen. Yet, as long as a gleam of consciousness lingered with him, he continued in some sort to indulge his old tastes; and although he dressed carelessly, and sunk into slovenliness latterly, there was still a touch of style about his faded dressing-gown, and in that ornate

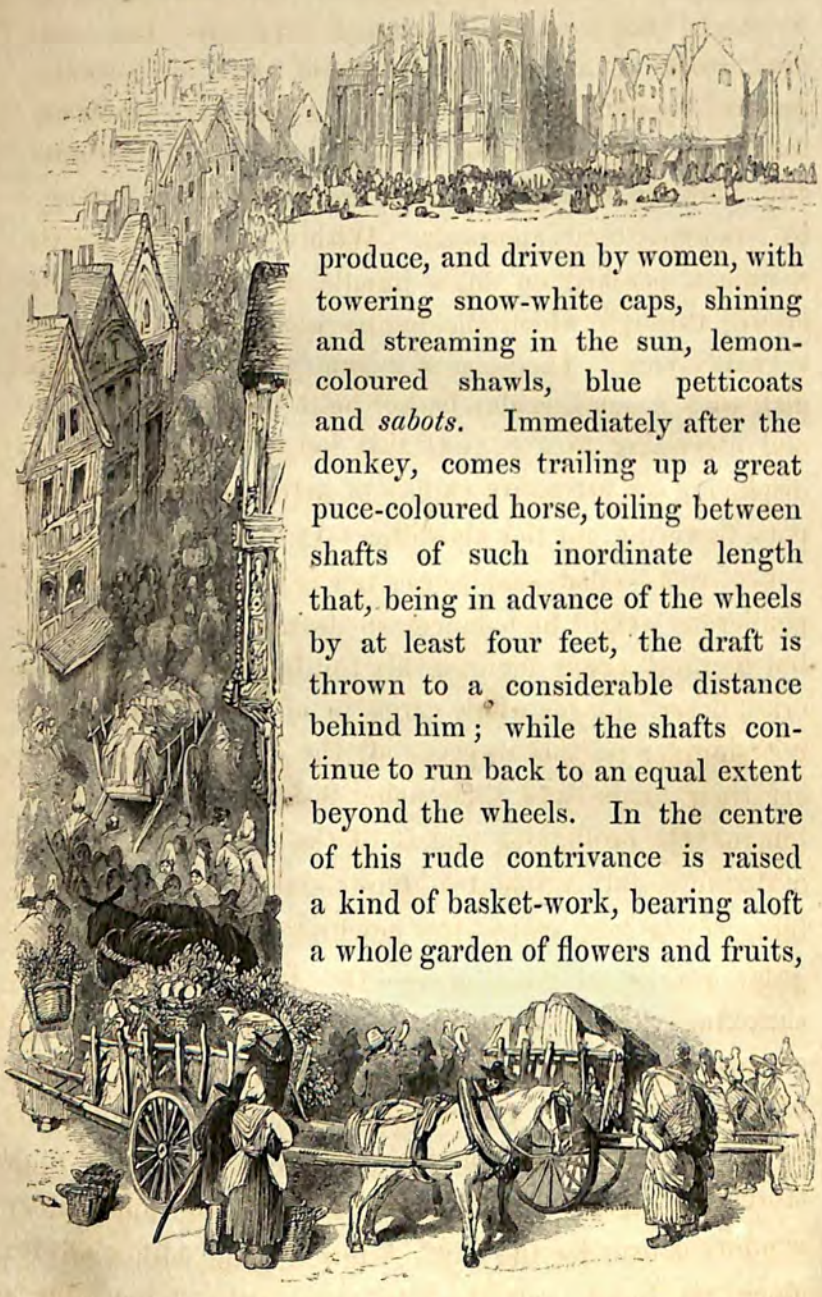
negligence of tie, upon the perfection of which he is said to have expended so many hours of his butterfly existence.

People who travel only in their arm-chairs acquire notions of foreign places which reality usually upsets at the first glance. Caen is a sort of *château en Espagne* in the story-books. The reader who has been in the habit of exploring the metrical romances and the rural statistics of French love and murder has probably built an aboriginal town for himself in a sequestered district, filled it with a simple population, wearing towering caps and *sabots*, and noted it down in his imagination as Caen. But when he comes to see the place, he will be duly disappointed in finding that the scene of so many sentimental lays and tragedies of unsophisticated passion (for Caen has a celebrity of this description in the annals of romantic crime), is a large, bustling, well-paved town, of 40,000 inhabitants, with not a scrap of poetry about it except the hills and forests, its old Norman churches and sinuous streets. Caen occupies such an irregular site, that the streets run up and down, and in and out, in a very odd way, and the city partakes of the beauty as well as the inconvenience of that circumstance. The principal streets, wide enough for all purposes, are choked up with people from sunrise to sunset; and the moment you step out of your hotel, the deafening noises of the retail business that is going on in these thronged passages, as well as in the elaborately furnished shops, soon satisfy you that, instead of being a paradise of picturesque antiquities, Caen is in fact a hive of hard-working industry.

In the citadel, up to which you must scramble by a

narrow toilsome ascent, pleasantly relieved by clusters of women sitting making lace at their open doors and windows, you may read the history of Caen. But as this history is to be found in a hundred and odd books, and as the birth, adventures, and death of William the Conqueror can present no novel attractions to an English reader, let us hurry into the streets, and look at the people. We must even pass by St. Etienne, sublime in its lofty simplicity, and the old abbeys, and all the other ecclesiastical memorials, grand and beautiful as they are, to peep into the markets, and fill our eyes with coifs and aprons and tinsel caps, as deftly tricked out as if they were freshly mounted for the stage; and staggering old houses, and broken ends of streets, that look very much as if they were "got up" for the same purpose.

The markets throw out some picturesque materials to the eye; but the *ensemble* is distracting. The masses of men, women, and children, congregated about the booths and stands, filling to suffocation every speck of ground, and the odours exhaled from the animal and vegetable composite, arrest you on the edge of the stench. Fortunately it is not in the markets the market business is done, or that we get at the *contour* and customs of the market people. Caen has a special way of its own in carrying on its daily traffic in vegetables and fish, flesh, and fowl. The affairs of the markets are not transacted in the places so called, but up and down through the streets. These ambulatory markets, during the hours of household preparation, give to the town the aspect of a great tumultuous fair. Sometimes there comes a donkey, pattering slowly along, heavily laden with panniers piled sky-high with all kinds of garden



produce, and driven by women, with towering snow-white caps, shining and streaming in the sun, lemon-coloured shawls, blue petticoats and *sabots*. Immediately after the donkey, comes trailing up a great puce-coloured horse, toiling between shafts of such inordinate length that, being in advance of the wheels by at least four feet, the draft is thrown to a considerable distance behind him; while the shafts continue to run back to an equal extent beyond the wheels. In the centre of this rude contrivance is raised a kind of basket-work, bearing aloft a whole garden of flowers and fruits,

or millinery work, or hardware, or the contents of a butcher's shop, or select extracts from the live and dead stock of a farm-yard. These carts are usually escorted by men in blue check frocks and dark trowsers, furnished with enormously long and powerful whips, and blowing cows' horns with most discordant energy to announce their approach. Within the cart is seated a woman perched up on a bundle, ready to serve the crowd, through which the lumbering machine moves at a snail's pace. Then comes a young man (sometimes a girl) with a semicircular basket built up flat to his back, and ascending to a considerable height above his head, displaying an attractive variety of articles—geraniums in pots, flowering out tier above tier—crisp broccoli—turnips —beet-root—salad—cabbages; nor is he satisfied with the ponderous weight he balances so dexterously on his back, but he must needs increase his toil by shrill ear-splitting cries, describing his whole cargo in minute detail. He is not singular in this respect; all the itinerant merchants cry their goods—and their name is legion. It is easy to imagine the prodigious uproar of the scene—the braying of donkeys, dull recipients of blows and *sacres!*—the rumbling of the long carts—the cracking of whips, like irregular volleys of small-arms—the Babel of cries—the shrieking of cows' horns—and the din of voices bartering, cheapening, clamouring throughout the length and breadth of the procession. But, happily, it lulls a little towards noon. By that time the townspeople have laid in their stores for dinner, and the occupation of the ambulatory vendors is over for the day. A few of them, with a surplus stock on hand, still straggle about, like drops after a

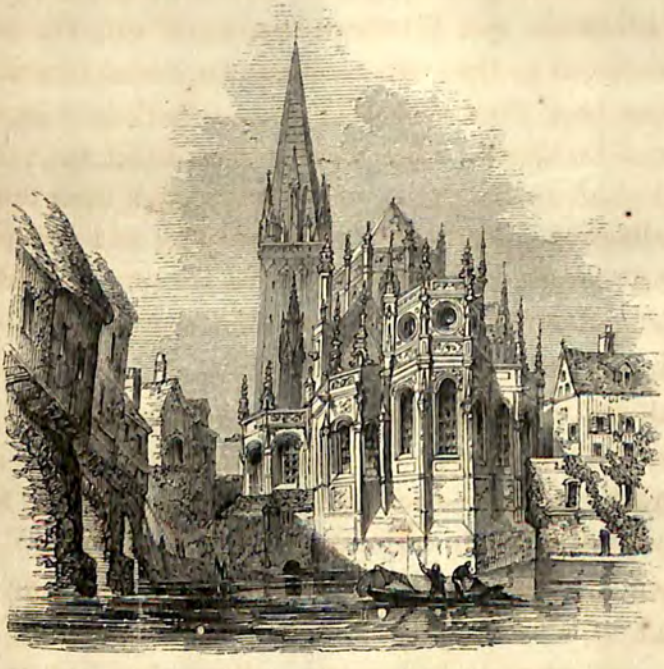
shower, hoping to catch some late customer, or to tempt others, already supplied, with a bargain from the refuse. But the riot is comparatively exhausted, and, with the exception of the clatter of *sabots,* the reverberations of voices down the narrow streets, or an incidental whip or horn dying away in the distance, the town is tolerably tranquil for the rest of the day.

VII.

THE CITADEL, THE CONQUEROR, THE CHURCHES.

If the streets of Caen are not altogether so picturesque as those of Rouen, there are some points of tempting interest for the artist. One of the most remarkable of these—on the Rue des Quaies—has hitherto escaped the honours of the pencil, while almost every other crevice of the town has been painted and engraved over and over again. This dusky, frowning old street runs down one bank of the Orne. The stream ripples past the back of the Church of St. Pierre, and is crossed at this spot by the Rue St. Jean, the houses of which being built over the bridge, cast the whole of that part of the water into deep shadow. The old church, with its vast illuminated windows and lofty spire piercing the skies—the low black archways of the bridge, buried under masses of antique houses—the jutting roofs, tottering balconies, wooden terraces, relieved by an occasional growth of ivy, and shrubs in boxes, and irregular façades of wood and stone, presenting infinite varieties of light and shade—the flotilla in the gloomy river below, where the sisterhood of the *blanchisserie* perform their mysteries—and the enormous tower and crazy bridge which terminate that side of the

picture—form a street-scene of a striking character. Visited by moonlight, or just before sunrise, you get at the artificial effects of the shadows falling on the river, and lying in the recesses of the quaint architecture.



Every step you take in Caen is upon historical ground, especially the citadel. Here you are treading a spot of earth which was trodden many centuries ago by William the Conqueror, and selected by him as the site of a fort, with a view to purposes he did not live to accomplish. At that time, the river was probably capable of floating up vessels of magnitude to the city, but the obstructions at its *embouchure* have long since rendered it unavailable on an extensive scale. At high tides they can sometimes bring vessels to the quays of one hundred and fifty or two

hundred tons burthen; a resource utterly inadequate to the wants of the place.

You ascend to the citadel by an abrupt, narrow, winding street, where you see a number of women sitting outside their doors making lace. These women are generally the wives of sailors and fishermen connected with the port, and being left to their own resources for several months in the year, they thus endeavour to beguile their time, and secure a livelihood. The rapidity with which the rollers round which the thread is wound fly through their fingers is bewildering. There they sit, chattering and gossiping, singing, and scolding the urchins that are sprawling about on the pavement, and all the time they are probably working a pattern of flowers, or fruit, or foliage of such delicate tracery that the slightest error would spoil its elegance. Yet they never make a mistake. They seem to work by instinct—such is the rapidity, apparent heedlessness, but absolute certainty of the process.

Having passed up this narrow street you gain the summit of a little hill. The military character of the scene now expands before you. Every incident in the picture indicates the uses of the place: the nakedness of the little hill itself—the broad, deep, dry moat, overgrown with glistening grass—the tattered bridge leading into the fort, with the solitary sentinel, who, having nothing to do, looks horribly tired—the guardhouse, with nothing to guard, and the green exercise ground, which, sprinkled over with linen spread out to dry, appears to be appropriated by the soldiers' wives. You cross the tattered bridge, and, mounting a flight of broken stone steps on the right hand, find yourself on the summit of the highest

part of the fortification. Here you have an imposing view of the descent into the moat. As you look down, a series of rocks seems to be toppling into the green abyss, and whichever way you turn you see nothing but monstrous battlements and terrible steeps. Below you, on one side, you observe a bridge spanning the gloomy depths from an ancient tower and gateway to an artificial promenade on the margin of the opposite hill. Winding down the inner descent you reach this bridge, but you must not cross. The promenade, consisting of a bare gravel walk without trees, inserted between two strips of sward, is reserved for certain privileged persons; and, unless you have previously obtained special permission, you will not be admitted into their worshipful company.

Returning, after peeping over the bridge into the grassy gulf below, and gazing upwards at the fortifications, which wear an impregnable aspect to non-military eyes, and wondering how flowers could find their way into such precipices of stone, you make a *détour* out of the fortifications by the garden of the commandant, passing through a rich green meadow, which is used for the double purpose of military exercise, and a pleasure-ground for the citizens, who in the summer weather collect here in crowds.

Although the names of William and Queen Matilda are as familiar as household words to the very peasantry here, not a single memorial of them remains except the citadel and the churches and abbeys they built, and a brief inscription. It is the same everywhere in Normandy—even at Falaise, where the Conqueror was born, and at Rouen where he died.

That history is the saddest of all the glory-histories on

record. The eyes of William the Conqueror were closed by menials, who, after helping themselves to his wardrobe, absconded, and abandoned the unburied corpse—as in his last hours he was forsaken by his friends and his family. A peasant took pity on the dead body of the king, and caused it to be conveyed to Caen for burial. As the bearers approached the city a fire broke out, and scattered the procession, such as it was. It seemed as if even this last miserable honour was interdicted by Destiny. Worse still happened on the way to the grave. Having reached the church at last, the form of a funeral *éloge* was got through with as much show of ceremony as circumstances permitted; but when the bishop called upon the people to pray for the soul of the deceased, a citizen sprang up, and vehemently protested against the interment. His father's house had stood upon that spot, and had been illegally seized by William, and its inmates driven out into the streets. For this wrong the citizen demanded restoration of the ground as the property of his family, and refused to let the rites proceed. The justice of the demand was seconded by the unanimous voice of the people; and the priests, after vainly remonstrating against the interruption, were compelled to compromise the matter, by purchasing from the citizen the little space of earth in which the remains of the monarch were about to be deposited. The burial service was suspended, while the price of the king's grave was debated and paid over in the nave of the church. This obstruction removed, all was now ready for the last office; but a strange fatality still followed the corpse. As the coffin was swung down, it struck against the sides of the grave, and breaking open

at the shock, flung its swollen contents so violently to the bottom, that the corpse burst. The effluvia which instantly filled the church was so overpowering that the people rushed out. Even the priests fled, and the last rites were left unfinished. The body was hastily huddled up in the earth, and lay there unmolested for nearly five centuries, when the Calvinists, who had heard that treasures of great value had been buried with it, tore up the grave, and finding nothing but the bones of the skeleton, collected them in a piece of red taffeta, and scattering them about the church, completed the desecration by destroying the gravestone. The relics were afterwards stealthily gathered, and placed for safe custody in the hands of a monk, who preserved them carefully in his cell, hoping to find an opportunity of restoring them to the rifled grave. But that opportunity never came. The same malignant destiny still pursued them. The town was sacked, the monks were expelled, and the bones dispersed for the last time. And all that now remains of William the Conqueror is a hip-bone, which a Norman gentleman begged, or bought, from the insurgents, and deposited under his monument.

Yet this king, so opprobriously dealt with, was a most royal benefactor to the town; and the indignities cast upon his dead body were perpetrated in the presence of those noble structures which owe their origin to his munificence. The churches ought to have saved him from neglect and contumely, if there was nothing due to him on his own account. The founder of the churches of St. Etienne and the Trinity—unsurpassed in the severe simplicity of their style—was entitled to the poor reward of being at least spared from insult in his tomb. These

churches are amongst the miracles of Norman art. We here miss the airiness and grace which at first sight enchant the imagination in some of the florid erections of a later date, and as we glance along the columns, they appear heavy after the minute embroidery the eye has been accustomed to elsewhere; but when you have fully entered into the repose of the nave and aisles, and become familiar with the majestic austerity of their proportions, the grandeur of the conception gains gradually upon the mind, and fills it with a feeling of profound awe. The recessed pillars, the groined roofs, the colonnaded naves, the vastness and elevation, are elements of a magnificence expressly characteristic of the highest forms of Norman architecture. The church of St. Pierre, more modern by two or three centuries, is the perfection of the poetry of ecclesiastical art. For exquisite beauty, elegance, and magnitude, the spire of this church is unrivalled; and the wonderful lightness of the interior—the tall, narrow arches, with their slender columns—the delicacy and fragility of the general design, and the great height to which the roof is carried without any visible means for its support, realise such a fabric as Keats or Spenser might have dreamed of.

But who can hope to convey any intelligible notion of these Caen churches? I have a bundle of notes (all of admiration!) about them, which I quietly consign to my portfolio. Whoever would obtain a true impression of such structures must go and see them.

VIII.

A PEEP INTO FAIRYLAND.

THE country between Caen and Avranche runs through the heart of the popular superstitions of Normandy. The character of the scenery harmonises to a miracle with the wild sorceries and fairy mythology which are still articles of faith amongst the peasantry, and which are derived chiefly from the Germans. The whole of this district is similar in its general features to that lying between Rouen and Caen, with greater variety and picturesqueness. It is more mountainous and abrupt, and the transitions are more sudden and surprising. You are perpetually fascinated by unexpected disclosures of charming bits of agricultural landscapes opening out of weird solitudes and dark woods, and coming upon you like the lulling melody of flutes, when their sweetness hushes into silence the brass-mouthed clamour of the orchestra. The road pierces luxuriant valleys richly draped with foliage, or covered with corn and pasturage, and presents a constant succession of hill and dale; sometimes descending into the depths of a forest, sometimes emerging into orchards and wheat-fields, sometimes straining the summits of mountains which, at a little distance, seem almost perpendicular, and sometimes rushing down fearful declivities with a

perilous velocity which curiously enhances the romantic interest of the scenery. But the road is in excellent condition, and there is not the slightest actual danger, alarming as it is to look upon the frantic gallop of the horses scattering over the highway, apparently beyond the control of the driver, who, to do him justice, is thrown at such moments into a delirious ecstasy, which divides your terror with the mad flight of the cattle.

It requires very little fancy to people this region with the fairies and were-wolves and apparitions which enter so largely into the superstitions of the people. The gloomy recesses of the forests, plunging down into green darkness many feet below the level of the highway, with fragments of white crags starting up here and there in their distant depths, so suggestive of the sheeted phantoms that are said to haunt them, supply you at once with a satisfactory machinery of witchcraft and ghost-lore. It is here that the *loup-garou,* who terrifies the lonely neighbourhood in the dark nights with his ravenous howl, may be supposed to have his lair; and here the unquiet spirits that find it impossible, for sundry unexplained reasons, to sleep in their graves, resort at midnight to wander about the dismal mazes of the forest, very careful not to wet their feet in the rills that run singing about the roots of the trees, although, according to all well-authenticated traditions, they are not afraid of catching cold in the long, slimy grass steeped in eternal damps.

The most interesting of all the Norman ghosts that frequent these wooded dells are the *fetiches,* which must not be confounded in any way with the *fetich* of the Indians. The Norman *fetich* is a much more poetical affair. These

gentle phantoms are purely white as lilies, or flakes of snow, and move about as noiselessly as so many rays of light. Occasionally they flicker round the suburbs of villages, but being remarkably timid, and incapable of any great enterprises, they usually glide away into clumps of trees, or hide themselves in the valleys where even the moon cannot find them out. These melancholy sprites are unbaptised infants, who, being placed in an awkward dilemma for lack of the baptismal certificate, are not qualified even for purgatory, and are thus condemned till the day of judgment to float up and down between heaven and hell. Their appeals for admission to the former place are understood to be perfectly fruitless, but whether, in their infantine despair, they have ever made a similar application at the latter has not, I believe, been ascertained.

Here, too, in these shadowy glens, on slender stretches of sward, under the shelter of lofty beeches and pines, you may see, or imagine you see, large rings marked out on the grass, and withered up with precision at the edges. These are the veritable *cercles des fées*. Bishop Corbett assures us, that the merry pastimes of the fairies went out in England in the reign of King James.

> "Witness these rings and roundelays
> Of theirs, which yet remain,
> Were footed in Queen Mary's days,
> On many a grassy plain;
> But since of late Elizabeth,
> And later James came in,
> They never danced on any heath,
> As when the time hath bin."

But it may be asserted with no less authority that they are not gone out in Normandy yet. The fairies still hold

their revels here as royally as ever. An existence which derives its lease from the imagination of the people runs no great risk of being disturbed in this part of the world. The over-growth of population has not yet cut down the woods and reared manufactories in their stead. The progress of utility has not yet built tall chimneys in these poetical ravines. The peasantry have not yet been disenchanted into stokers and navvies; and the old faith still lingers lovingly in their sequestered homesteads.

The fairy-legends of Normandy are full of a humanising tenderness, which falls in gracefully with the sombre earnestness of the popular temperament. These fairies are not specially distinguished, like other fairies, for skipping about in the moonlight. Out of the exuberance of their fairy nature, they indulge in romps and dances; but they have more in them of the genteel-comedy qualities of Titania, than of the mischievous traits of Puck and Robin Goodfellow. They are capable of the softest emotions, and have often been known to suffer severely under the blight of disappointed affections. The fairy, like beauties of another order, sometimes begins by playing with the passion of love, confiding in her own invulnerable power, and ends by being taken in the very trap she had so ingeniously laid for her mortal lover. Once caught in this way, the poor fairy is even less able to extricate herself than the human sorceress whose divinations she so fatally imitates.

There was a famous knight in this country who flourished nobody knows how many years ago, and whose name was Robert of Argouges. His story has often been told, and is one of the stock traditions of the province; but it will

be new to a great many people for all that. The grand achievement of his life was a single combat with a Teutonic giant, who had slain every man he encountered until he met Robert of Argouges, by whom he was himself slain. Upon an ordinary calculation of the chances between that prodigious personage and a middle-sized Norman knight, such a result could hardly have been anticipated, and it was, therefore, surmised that Robert of Argouges was sustained in this very unequal duel by superhuman aid. This opinion was strengthened by a device of Faith which he wore emblazoned on his shield and banner, and by the battle-cry of *La Foi—la fé,* which descended from him for many generations afterwards to his family. The real facts of the case were these:

Robert had become acquainted with a certain beautiful fairy in the woods, and had fallen in love with her. There is no accounting for such things. He knew she was a fairy, and no fit bride for him, but he fell deeply in love with her notwithstanding. At first he reasoned a little with himself; so did she perhaps, if beautiful fairies are capable of reasoning. He was well aware in a vague way of the fairy antecedents of her life, and of what he might expect if he suffered his passion for her to overwhelm his knightly judgment. But he imagined that, fortified by all this knowledge and good sense, and by his pretty extensive acquaintance with the nature of fairies in general, there was not much likelihood of matters growing very serious between them. He regarded it as a delectable pastime, and used to go to the woods to see her, thinking that nothing would come of it but the delight he felt in gazing into the depths of her lustrous eyes, in listening to

the thrilling music of her voice, and pressing her soft hands, which he never touched without an admonitory vibration at his heart. And this fairy was endowed with wondrous beauty. Her head, exquisitely formed, with features as youthful as childhood, and locks crisped round them and floating upon the winds, combined the freshness of Hebe and the radiant joyousness of a *bacchante;* while her form was that of a voluptuous maturity. It was natural enough for Robert of Argouges to fall in love with her—fairy though she was.

The fairy, on her side, believed she was merely indulging in an amusement very common amongst fairies. She was conscious of a secret satisfaction in winning the affections of so gallant a knight. From the first, she was attracted by the peculiar gentleness of his manners, and was so pleased with his society that, had she been but half as much on her guard as she foolishly believed she was, the danger that lay before them both must have been early apparent to her. But the fairy, like the knight, had fallen irretrievably in love, and all her arts, and her self-control, and her command over the inspiration by which she had subjected her mortal lover, could not save her.

As for the knight, he became more and more entranced every day. He gradually absorbed her whole thoughts, and won her away from all her old associations. She no longer haunted the dells where she was once idolised as the gayest of the fairies, and she forsook the lively round to wander away with her lover in the sad woods. She bestowed upon him all the treasures over which her influence extended, the hidden riches of the mountains and the waters, and by her spells secured victory to him in all

his battles. Thus, when he encountered the Teutonic savage, Robert of Argouges obtained an easy triumph.

His love was now at its height, and no consideration could restrain him from making a proposal of marriage to the fairy. In short, he felt that he could not live without her, and that it was better to incur all the mysterious perils of such a union than to pine into the grave in despair. She hesitated very much at first; for when matters come to that point with fairies they are proverbially shy and embarrassed. She told him very frankly that she had heard terrible tales of the inconstancy of men, and that, moreover, being mortal, he would be sure to die, while she would be left to an immortality of sorrowing widowhood. An immortal widow was an image that had never suggested itself to the imagination of Robert of Argouges, and it took him a little by surprise; but he soon overcame her scruples. Ah! that sophistry of love, how it deceives the wisest people! He assured her, that, though he was himself mortal, his love could never die; that in fact his love for her was more than human. She believed him, and she consented to become his wife on one condition, that he should never think of death, nor suffer the word *death* to pass his lips. He thought this a very easy condition, and agreed at once. She merely observed—but a shadow of sadness fell upon her bright face as she spoke—"Should you ever utter that word, that instant I must abandon you, and be wretched for ever!"

The fairy and the knight were accordingly married, and lived together as happily as the day was long. Years passed away, and neither of them ever thought that their bliss could have an end.

It happened that they were bidden to a grand festival, and the lady-fairy was more than usually scrupulous about her toilet. All her handmaidens were busily employed in selecting her finest dresses and most costly jewels; while the knight, already in full costume, waited impatiently for her in the hall. Once, twice, thrice, he sent up his page to hasten her, and each time received an answer that she was coming. At length she appeared most gloriously attired; but Robert of Argouges was vexed at the delay, and, instead of accosting her in terms of admiration, he exclaimed, "Fair lady! you have been in no haste at your toilette. You tarry so confoundedly, that you would be the best of all messengers to send for *death*."

The fatal word was scarcely pronounced when the beautiful fairy turned pale, her full eye rested upon him for a moment with an expression of unutterable anguish, and she vanished from his sight. The space around him was vacant. He stood like a man bewildered. He was now conscious of what he had said, and of what he had lost for ever. A sudden sickness seized him, and he was carried to his bed, where he lingered many days in profound anguish of mind. Every night the fairy flew round the tower where he lay, wailing with a piteous voice, "Death! Death!" till at last the knight died. And to this hour, at midnight, the same melancholy voice may still be heard wailing round the old castle its passionate lamentation of "Death! Death!"

Such is the true history of Robert of Argouges.*

* There are other versions of this legend, but we have wasted some laborious researches in the archives of Fairyland, if this be not the correct one. The fairy chroniclers, like all other early historians, have a perplexing way of

contradicting each other, and, although we find them generally keeping pretty accurately to the main facts, they exhibit strange differences in minor details. Thus, it is stated by some of these authorities, that Robert of Argouges never saw the fairy with whom he fell in love till he made proposals of marriage to her; that in fact he fell in love with her voice, and used to go into the woods to hear her sing, and that they used to respond to each other verse for verse, after the manner of two stage-lovers in an opera, supposing an impenetrable screen to be placed between them. It will be admitted that this version of the matter is neither very likely, nor very creditable to the common sense of the knight; and it must be satisfactory to the feelings of the Argouges family, who may be supposed to be deeply interested in the reputation of their illustrious ancestor, to know that, if he did fall in love with a fairy, it was under circumstances to which men of even a more Platonic cast could scarcely be blamed for yielding. Another historian tells us that he lived many years after the disappearance of the lady, and, by the help of his invisible guardian, slew a great baron who made a descent upon his castle. But this is a sort of reflection upon the tenderness and fidelity of his character, which there can be no hesitation in pronouncing to be at least apocryphal.

IX.

THE VAUX DE VIRE.

THE town of Vire is the first place of any consequence you arrive at *en route* from Caen to Avranche. The approach seems about as impracticable as the feat of a harlequin, when you see him preparing to leap up to the moon. You must literally scale the face of a precipitous hill to get into it. But the adventure gives you an opportunity of admiring anew the peculiar powers of the French horses. How they manage to keep their footing and scramble up the stony street which conducts you in a straight line to the summit of the town, not having even a zigzag to relieve their toil or help their breathing, is a veterinary mystery. The truth is, that gods, men, and columns are different in France from all other parts of the world.

I know not how it is, but neither English horses nor English drivers, with all their blood and dexterity, would attempt the things that are actually accomplished every day in France with the greatest apparent ease, and under, what we at least should consider, the most disadvantageous circumstances. The manner in which these creatures are kept at their work increases the marvel. Harness, properly speaking, they have none. One of the wheel-horses,

perhaps, will have some fragments of a set of harness, picked up from the refuse of an English stable, head-stall, girth, and reins so rusty, and tattered, and patched, and tied up, that you expect they will go to pieces every moment; the next horse will be nearly bare; while the three leaders will be governed by ropes and strings of different textures and strengths, knotted together after a fashion which shows that the whole affair is an *impromptu*, and that there is not the slightest attempt at preparation for the necessities of a journey. Yet wonderful are the exploits performed by the monstrous diligence which is whisked up and down the hills by these independent steeds.

The rate at which they gallop up the steepest ascents is incredible. The general system of the postillions in the management of their horses may be thus described; and surely none of the evolutions in the circus at Astley's ever equalled it. On immediately turning the crest of a hill, the postillion goes gently with a caressing and encouraging voice. He and his cattle understand eath other perfectly, and they know as well as he does what is coming. Towards the middle he slackens his pace, and goes still more slowly; but he has scarcely reached the point of the greatest danger, where the dip of the hill gives a sudden and fearful rapidity to the sweep of the road, nearing the bottom, than he throws out that shrill jerking cry which is the token of impetuous haste, and cracking his whip some half dozen times in breathless succession, producing a volley of sounds like the sharp shots of a pistol fired close to your ear, he sets off his horses at full gallop. He now rears himself aloft in his stirrups in an access of ungovernable enthu-

siasm, and appears to enter fully into the wild career of the animals that are flying before him in a condition of insane excitement. Having thus impelled them helter-skelter with break-neck velocity to the bottom, he redoubles his efforts to gallop up the next acclivity. The horses, therefore, have to descend one hill, and instantly take the rise of another at the top of their speed. The postillion no sooner reaches half the ascent than, as before, he slackens his pace, and allows his panting coursers to take breath. But I have seen them at a heat of this kind take the whole hill without a pause, the postillion gathering them to a point with magical celerity and adroitness towards the crown of the summit to dash pell-mell over a narrow drawbridge, or through an archway which, at the first glance, appeared too small to admit the diligence. English postillions, also, take descents and ascents in a hand-gallop: but it is in the degree and continuity of the velocity that the French transcend all comparison. That, too, which may be conceived to be done with comparative safety by our trim coaches and artistically harnessed horses, becomes quite another affair when it is outdone by the towering diligence, and five or seven horses that look at least as if they were running away without the possibility of controlling their movements.

Vire is pitched on the pinnacle of a hill. The choice of such a situation is explained by the origin of the place, which was originally, time out of mind, nothing more than a strongly fortified castle. In the usual battering processes to which it was exposed, having been taken and retaken, sacked, blown up, and restored over and over again by the Bretons, French, and English, a little city

gradually crept up round the blackened walls, under which the terrified inhabitants of the surrounding country had at various periods sought shelter. There is a river, called the Vire, which runs round about the city in a sinuous and tantalising manner; and the city is called after the river; and the river is called after itself, in virtue of its many turns and windings.

Vire was formerly the capital of the Bocage, before the geographical, like the social, distinctions of France had undergone a revolution; and by its position commands the whole of those delicious valleys which are known as the Vaux de Vire. The sylvan beauty of the scenery can hardly be surpassed. The hill is clasped by charming labyrinths of wood, intersected by walks and tracks which stretch downwards through endless ingenious mazes to the still valleys below. Here you may lose yourself at pleasure in a thousand shadowy recesses, green slopes, and rural lanes. The dreamy hill-sides, with their deep foliage, and singing rills, are filled with all sorts of suggestive woodland sights, sounds, and odours. Descending into the valley, you come upon one of the prettiest streams that ever sparkled in a solitary dell. At first sight, it does not seem to have made a regular channel for itself, but to run through the trees at its own coquettish caprice. You catch it glancing now in one place, now in another, and always as if it were flirting through the wood with the birds and the water-lilies; and it is not till you have made your way to the banks of the stream, bowered over by trees, dipping their branches across in all manner of picturesque attitudes, that you are conscious of the presence of a river that turns several mills up the valley,

besides serving other useful purposes which one must look after to ascertain.

The seclusion of these valleys lulls the scenes like an enchantment, after the noises and scrambling bustle of the little streets from which you made your escape only five minutes before. You might easily imagine yourself hundreds and hundreds of miles away from that clattering, flinty high road which traverses the hill immediately above. There is hardly a sound to be heard, except the whirring of birds through the leaves, the ripple of the water as it breaks over its pebbly bottom, and, as you advance farther and farther, the clicking and plash of the mill-wheels. Occasional openings in the woods reveal scraps of the sweetest pastoral scenery, miniature gardens, sheltered orchards, and tiny vistas vanishing into the recesses of the hills. Tempting foot-paths run in and out amongst the trees, with pretty swinging gates and turnstiles, which you are at liberty to invest with what sylvan romances you please.

It is not to be denied that the operations of industry are beginning to break up the charms of the Vaux. A huge manufactory here and there shoulders the hanging woods, and unpleasantly reminds us that the green earth was not given to us solely for the uses of poetry, a wholesome truth which we are bound to treat with respect, but which we would rather reserve for consideration in other scenes and circumstances. Luckily we are able to compromise the matter by a peep at the rustic mills in which poetry and utility are pleasantly combined; and above all at the mill of Olivier Basselin, the poet of the Vaux. Very little of the original mill remains, and that little has nearly

lost its character by annexation with a new house of a totally different style. But there is just enough of it to satisfy one's curiosity about the actual spot where that very jolly miller wrote those sparkling lyrics which were the ruin of his business, and the delight of the whole country round. The burthen of Basselin's songs was wine, and although the French are not a revelling people, they have such an impulse for gaiety and enjoyment in whatever shape they are presented, that these songs acquired a wide and lasting popularity. The freedom of the rhythm, the sparkling *abandon* of the sentiments, and the tripping vivacity of the *réfrain*, hit off the national taste with wonderful felicity. Basselin's songs are so expressly adapted to the genius of the people that they perish in the attempt to render them into any other language. They will not bear transplantation. For instance, how could we hope to convey in English such a flash of mirth as this?—

"Hé! qu' avons-nous affaire
Du Turc et du Sophy!
Don! Don!
Pourvu que j'ai à boire
De grandeurs je d'y fi,
Don! Don!
Trinque, seigneur, le vin est bon,
Hoc acuit ingenium."

Basselin sometimes touched upon love, but it was all in the French way. True passion was out of the question with this merry dog of a miller. It was a glance, and a pretence of being wounded by a passing ray of light, and off again to his bottle. Of course, he neglected his mill, which was put into the hands of trustees; but he sang

away as jovially as ever, and, when all other resources failed, took arms for the defence of the city. He is described by the chroniclers, as the "joyeuse troubadour Normand, qui non moins bon patriot que bon chansonnier, fut tué, en 1417, en combattant les Anglais." His *chansons* were called "Vaux-de-Vires," after the locality out of whose romantic depths they issued, and hence originated the term Vaudeville, of which class of pleasant dramatic trifles, he is now acknowledged to be the father. A learned controversy was waged for some time about this term, which was asserted on one side to be derived from an earlier period, and from the custom of singing songs in the streets, by which the etymon was traced to the phrase *voix-des-villes*. But the dispute has been abandoned, and the paternity of the vaudeville is now universally surrendered to Olivier Basselin.

A century or so later, Basselin was succeeded by Le Houx, an advocate, who lived at Vire, and who, like his predecessor, relinquished his business to follow minstrelsy and the bottle. Le Houx's *chânsons*, like the myriads of airy lyrics that have floated through France since his time, followed closely in the channels which had been first opened up by his predecessor. His inspiration was at second-hand; but this was no great matter in a class of fugitive pieces which ran the round of the same gay, idle topics, and which might be thrown off with facility by any Frenchman who possessed the requisite lyrical faculty and constitutional levity. Le Houx was an enthusiastic admirer of Basselin, and collected, and edited his works; an act of loving zeal for which he was duly punished by the monks, who regarded the scandal with such indig-

nation that they ordained him to do penance for it by a pilgrimage to Rome, from whence, however, he returned as incorrigible a libertine as ever.

We must not leave Vire without a word upon the beauty of the women. It is the first thing that strikes a stranger in the streets of the little town. The character of the face is different from that of all the other Norman women we have yet seen. The complexion is generally brunette, the mouth small and delicate, and the eyes are radiant with sprightliness and coquetry. The figure is smaller and more gracefully formed than that of the women of Caen or Rouen; and the dress is evidently chosen with considerable art to show off these advantages to the utmost. They are particularly careful about the snowy whiteness of their linen; their petticoats, short and brilliant in colour, afford ample room and atmosphere to exhibit their small feet and ancles, with which they flirt as skilfully as with their eyes; their picturesque Cauchoise caps, rising to a great height in the form of a half-spread fan with a long train hanging down the back; a transparent gauze over the shoulder and bosom, which are fully displayed by the extreme lowness of the dress; a pretty flying collar, called *point-à-jour*, and a black bead necklace, complete a costume so piquant and effective as to fascinate your attention the moment you enter the town. Of all the attractions of Vire, and they are numerous and charming, it is no heresy of taste to say that the conscious beauty of the women, of which they make so effective a display, is incomparably the most captivating.

X.

VILLE-DIEU.

From the seductive heights of Vire, after traversing a pleasant stretch of intervening country, we plunge into a valley, that folds itself in diminishing coils till it terminates in a small circular dell, at the bottom of which stands the town of Ville-Dieu. It looks exactly as if it had been shot down into an abyss of trees, and had been considerably dislocated in the process. Whoever wishes to see a veritable town of the middle ages, with all its modes and tenements in perfect preservation, ought to go to Ville-Dieu. There is no space round about its staggering gables to enable the inhabitants to enlarge or re-construct it, even if they were so inclined. Its peculiar position renders improvement almost impossible, and its staple handicraft, which owes much of its reputation to the length and strength of its traditions, renders change of any sort undesirable. It seems to be a matter of policy, as well as necessity, with the people to keep up as well as they can the medieval character of the place. It must be allowed that they have succeeded to a miracle. I never saw a town which betrays so few touches of the hand of progress. It has the aspect of a place which had been thrown into a trance by some powerful wizard ages ago, and had remained in that condition ever since.

Sunk in a profound solitude, the gloomy austerity of Ville-Dieu helps out that antique tone which is so curiously realised in its close, dark passages. At the first glance, it suggests the idea of a small city that had tumbled into a hollow—houses, trees, and all—everything gradually settling into its place in the course of time. Streets there are, no doubt, but they abut each upon each at such odd angles and abrupt turns that they resemble broken rows of dominoes placed in and out by the fingers of a man labouring under a severe fit of palsy. The quaint houses, black, small, and frightfully out of the perpendicular, inspire you with the horrible suspicion that there is a power of vitality in them, not to step out of their foundations, but to fall upon you of their own volition, being apparently independent of the law of gravitation; and, as you move cringingly along, you expect every moment to be buried under a mass of stones and smashed timber, the streets looking as if they were premeditatingly toddling about you with a drunken intent to shut you up. Then there is a river, or rivulet, running, or sprawling, through Ville-Dieu, and a bridge you can hop over, and osiers growing near at hand, and an occasional melancholy willow weeping as fast as it can into the stream, and glimpses of green woods, convertible by the imagination into dim retreats for the fairies, who, from time immemorial, have haunted this grim valley, and played mischievous pranks with the inhabitants. How they have made the contents of the *pot au feu* fly up the chimney; how they have turned many a brave old woman's petticoats inside out; how they have whisked off old men's wigs, and made the hearts of young girls beat

till they have broken the strings of their bodices, are incidents in the history of Ville-Dieu which are said to be recorded upon the most respectable authority. If one could get out of one's head the ragged clumps of gables knocking each other about as if rocking in the fury of a tempest, the stunted entries and windows, the crazy dormitories stretching their necks out of the roofs as if they wanted to look down into the street, and the blue-black pools of water with treacherous little rocks of stones in them that make the navigation of the town a dangerous undertaking—if one could get all these things out of one's head, it might be possible to conjure up a troop of fairies in the twilight of this lower world. But the fairies are more select in their taste, and having so many choicer places in these valleys for their recreation, would hardly think of setting up even a branch establishment at Ville-Dieu.

The origin of Ville-Dieu is traced to a company of the knights of Malta, who gathered around them on this spot a body of workmen skilful in the fabrication of articles used in the ceremonies of the church, such as censers, long candlesticks, sconces, and the like. These still constitute the great business of the town. The women, as usual, occupy themselves in making lace, but how they manage to make it in their murky doorways, rarely visited by enough of light to enable them to see the outlines growing under their hands, is rather a perplexing consideration. This lace-making, however, so common in all the towns and villages, especially in the most ragged parts of them, is an insignificant item in the industry of Ville-Dieu compared with the copper-works. It is impossible

to pass through the town without discovering this fact. Nor is the copper manufacture confined to sacred purposes. It embraces secular as well as ecclesiastical objects, and the windows and shop-fronts, and benches stretching half-way into the streets, which can ill afford such an invasion of their limited space, present a promiscuous collection of brass-kettles and candelabras, saucepans and cherubims, burnished crucifixions and angels with their wings beaten out, lying aslant and upside down amongst stewpans and skillets. You literally pick your steps through a dazzling variety of church furniture and kitchen utensils.

The early interest attached to its copper crosses and cathedral lamps survives as freshly as ever in Ville-Dieu. It is one of the very few places in France where the old religious festivals are kept up with all the ancient pomp and enthusiasm. The *fête Dieu* is here a solemnity to which the whole country round subscribes either in money or attendance, or both. It realises the elaborate magnificence and theatrical art of a former age. The altar, on this occasion, is set forth with prodigal costliness; the church is illuminated from the floor to the roof; an army of priests gives an imposing importance to the ceremonies; troops of young people are dressed up to represent the various prominent personages of the Bible; and the neighbouring parishes, in addition to crowds of curious spectators from distant quarters, pour out their populations to swell the grandeur of the processions. A visit to Ville-Dieu during this annual spectacle may be recommended to people who have abundance of leisure and a liberal relish for a pious galantie-show on a large scale.

XI.

NORMAN CAPS, AND THE FACES UNDER THEM.

We are now in the neighbourhood of Granville; let us make an excursion off the main road to look at the favourite watering-place of these districts, and the syrens whose spells have given it such celebrity. The women of Granville are the prettiest in Lower Normandy; that is, perhaps, the exact phrase. But first a word about Granville itself.

The fortress of Granville stands on the top of a ledge of rock that runs out into the sea, and whether you approach it by land or by water presents a bold and striking appearance. It was built by the English when they were masters of this country, as a check upon Mont St. Michel, the only strong place in the province they failed to reduce. The spot on which it is erected was purchased from the Lord Granville, no less a person than John of Argouges, a direct descendant of that loving knight who married the fairy. The town of Granville clambers up the side of the precipice under the walls of the fort, and, like all towns similarly situated, is distinguished by a repulsive air of poverty and stagnation. The fort casts its shadow over the gloomy streets, and everything in and

about it is subservient to military influence. With the exception of the old Norman cathedral, dark, massive, and unembellished, there is not a single building in Granville that will tempt you to loiter for a moment. The remainder of the town seems to have been run up at the least possible cost, and without any view to permanency, as if the inhabitants, like the soldiers, were only doing garrison duty, and did not know the moment that they might be put to the rout.

Yet to this place, where the inns are execrable, people come from Avranches, and still greater distances, for the purpose of bathing; some of them, perhaps, being drawn by the attraction of the pretty faces for which, notwithstanding its ungeniality in other respects, Granville is justly famous.

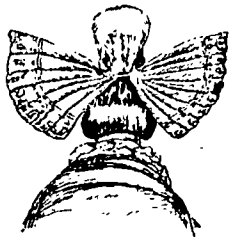
The women of Normandy are the handsomest in France. The style of the Granville face is different from that of the rest of the province, having less dignity and more sprightliness, and resembling, in character and expression, the sparkling brunette of Vire. The features are small, the complexion is pure and transparent, and the figure delicately moulded, and rather inclined to the *petite*. The head-dress enhances the charm of this round smiling face. It consists of linen as white as snow, folded to a high point in the centre, divided into graceful falls, terminating in a fluted frill over the forehead, and doubled into numerous folds at the back, after the manner of a French napkin,—which, from the ingenuity exhibited in its arrangement for the table, deserves to be set apart

from all other napkins. A rich lace frill of several rows, pursed like a ruff, surrounds the clear white neck, and a shawl, generally of crimson with a broad green and yellow pattern at the edge, is hung cornerwise over the shoulders. Add to this a grey petticoat, a light blue gown, open at the back, to show the petticoat from the waist downwards, white stockings, and lemon-coloured shoes and gloves, and you have a full description of the costume *en grande parure* of a woman of Granville. Sometimes they wear over their dress a *capot* of black silk or serge lined with white, not unlike a Spanish mantilla with a hood, which, thrown over the cap, and defining its summit and sides, gives a peculiarly arch expression to their brilliant features.

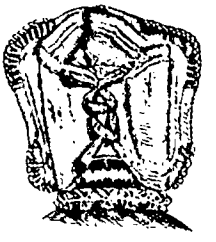
The Granville cap is amongst the simplest and plainest of all the Norman varieties. At Rouen, Caen, Coutances, Bayeux, and Falaise, we fall in with forms so wilful and fantastic, that we might suspect the matter to be left entirely to the caprice of the wearer. There is only one essential point of agreement in these head-dresses. Provided they be of sufficient altitude to take the eyes of the spectator by surprise, no other condition appears to be attached to their structure. In all cases their dimensions are gigantic, whether they ascend like a steeple to pierce the skies, stream off in ribbons like the pennons of a ship on a gala day, terminate upwards in a clump, like an inverted bulbous root, or taking a

circular sweep in the air, resemble a dozen or so of turbans rolled into one. These reliques of the middle ages produce a bewildering effect upon a stranger, who finds it difficult to distinguish the cap of one department from the cap of another, although each has its own marked peculiarities.

They are uniformly made of white linen, generally richly edged with lace. In some instances they take the shape of a butterfly, delicate ribbons artistically blended up the centre to form the body, and large graceful scrolls of plaited linen, deeply worked at the ends, to form the wings, an illusion which is materially assisted by the flapping of the wind. One of the most singular specimens is to be seen at Rouen. Here the hair is suffered to escape in small ringlets over the forehead, the rest of the luxurious tresses being bound in a large roll behind to support the ponderous cap, which rises to an enormous height, and is crowned by an expanded fan of white folds, from which depends a double fall of linen, trimmed with point lace at each side, and descending upon the shoulders. The centre of this elaborate piece of workmanship, springing from the arch of the forehead, ascends triangularly half way up the front, and is composed of deep blue silk or satin, braided with rows of coloured stones, the cheap spurious jewellery with which the French towns abound, and forming a striking contrast to the white surface that rises far above it into the air. The back of the cap is sometimes even more remarkable than the front, especially in the neighbour-



hood of Coutances. The front ascends perpendicularly from the head, and is surmounted by a highly starched screen, frilled carefully at the edge, and extending outwards to a considerable distance, and then suddenly turning off and descending in a straight line at each side. At the back the whole of this linen paraphernalia is folded inwards, and the recess thus formed in the centre is filled with knotted ribbons and beads, or such other tinsel as can be procured. The interior of the recess is often crowded with a variety of meretricious ornaments. The ear-ring, usually a large hoop, sometimes a long pendant, is a conspicuous article in the head-gear of the peasantry.



Then there is a grand cap frilled and plaited to the top, disclosing a rose-coloured ribbon prettily knotted in front, which traces the outline of the centre till it reaches the pinnacle where it is crowned with lace, a brooch fastened over the middle of the forehead, and a fluted frill drawn tightly down the cheeks, and meeting at a point under the chin. A ruff standing out closely round the neck gives a muffled appearance to the face, which peeps out like a sunburst from amidst these fleecy clouds of millinery. In former times, when money was more plentiful and trinkets less costly, the peasantry used to display gold and silver tissues and brilliant stones in their caps; but they are now compelled to put up with ribands and cheap embroidery, and an occasional garish breast-pin stuck across the

front, or in the thick of the wilderness of embellishments behind.

The beauty of the Normans is a proverb all over the world. Nor has the universal admiration which has been bestowed upon it, in the slightest degree exaggerated its lofty and exquisite character. The men, in their way, are as handsome as the women. They have the fine oval face, sedate bright eyes, and clear complexions of the old race. You look in vain for evidence of their Teutonic descent in these sculptured features; the skin and hair alone suggesting a reminiscence of their Saxon ancestry. The women are remarkable for the natural dignity of their carriage, which harmonises strikingly with their tall and commanding figures, and the gravity and reserve of their expression. Like the men, their faces are oval, with the slightly aquiline nose, large flashing eyes, and curved lips. Their complexions are peculiarly transparent, the cheeks mantling over with a blush, rich in colour, but delicate in its diffusion. A smile sits in their eyes, but the most inquisitive observer cannot detect in their looks or manner the remotest indication of levity. A sweet seriousness is their predominant characteristic. It is strange enough to an Englishman to meet groups of these people, men and women, reproducing before our eyes that famous Norman head with which we are all so familiar. It carries us back at once to the eleventh century. Wherever we turn, we see, as in a magic glass, William the Conqueror moving up the streets and highways.

As for the caps, they are sprinkled over the country districts, and are to be seen on Sundays and holidays principally. When numerous groups of the peasantry are

collected on such occasions, the effect of these towering heaps of snow, rushing up like a collection of little Alpine *aiguilles*, is novel and startling. But what a formidable costume to make love to! a gallant of the ordinary height would be lost under the colossal shadow.

Unfortunately, however, it is only at fêtes and in rural places this old-world head-dress is now to be met with in profusion and variety. The women of Normandy have latterly adopted a new style of cap, and the fashionable circles have heard nothing about it. If the shape of a sleeve were changed in the *salons* of Paris, the important novelty would be published in every corner of Europe, would penetrate to the back settlements of America, and agitate the haberdashery councils of the civilised world. Yet few greater revolutions in costume have been effected than in the primitive cap of Normandy, still fewer so silently, and not one that ever excited so little notice. It may even be doubted whether the fact has transpired beyond the limits of the province.

These elaborate productions, in short, are rapidly vanishing into oblivion. A new, a cheaper, and more convenient fashion has already almost totally supplanted them. Abandoning these steeples of intricate frostwork, the Norman peasantry, men, women, and children alike, have taken to cotton caps with tassels, precisely the same that is worn as a common night-cap in England. In the gardens, fields, and orchards, and at the doors of the cottages, you see nothing but cotton night-caps, which has the effect of making the population look as if they were preparing all day long to go to bed.

The change may be for the better. It is probably a

vast improvement in the way of utility, but it spoils a charming picture; much in the same manner as the introduction of temperance into Ireland, by enabling the peasantry to save their money for good broad-cloth and brogues, destroyed their aboriginal attractions. "We are a great deal more comfortable," exclaims Pat, "*but we are not half so picturesque.*"

XII.

AVRANCHES.

LIKE most of the Norman towns, Avranches is planted hill-wise. The main street makes a sharp ascent to the heights on which stand the *boulevards,* where the English "most do congregate." There is one decided advantage in this method of building towns in a country where the art of draining is either little understood or sparingly practised. When a tempest of rain sets in upon Avranches, the water comes thundering and leaping down this steep street, and washes it with the fury of a torrent in a quarter of an hour. When the rain is over, and the sun breaks out, and the surface of the pavement dries up, then there is no cleaner or brighter spot to be seen than this grand highway of Avranches. We will say nothing about its appearance at other times, or about the miry lanes and narrow labyrinths that run off into the denser parts of the town, muddy mazes which we suspect few visitors to Avranches ever ventured to explore.

This place is of considerable antiquity, and enjoys to a greater extent than most of its neighbours the historical glory of having been sacked, burned, razed to the ground, and rebuilt innumerable times. It was originally under the dominion of the Druids, who were displaced by the

Romans; and it is probably out of a traditional reverence for their early masters that the people to this day cultivate so assiduously the study of archæology. Indeed there is hardly anything else in the way of study cultivated here. The past alone seems to engross the attention of the inhabitants, who are pre-eminently distinguished for their utter neglect of the present and the future.

With extraordinary advantages of position—a town built on the side of a hill, having a river running at its foot, and commanding a noble situation on the heights, surrounded by one of the wealthiest agricultural districts in France—the apathy and slothful indifference of the people in availing themselves of such tempting opportunities of improvement are perfectly incredible. The narrow roads and lanes about Avranches, through which the farmers contrive to convey their produce, and which are indispensable to the intercourse of town and country, are in such a condition as to be difficult of transit in summer and impassable in winter. The notion of putting these lanes and roads in order has apparently never occurred to the people who are most concerned in the daily use of them. The soil, originally soft and yielding, has been left undisturbed in these miserable tracks. No attempt is made even to level them, and although the sea-shore is close at hand, not a handful of gravel or sand has ever been strewn upon the surface. The consequence is, that in winter the cart-wheels sink two or three feet in the mud, and leave such deep ruts and ridges behind, that in summer, when they become hardened by the heat, they look as if the clay had been roughly thrown up in long lines for the purpose of laying down a series of pipes. If

you attempt to ride through one of these rural lanes, it is almost a certainty that you will break your horse's legs: and if you try the experiment of walking, the chances are that you will break your own. As to driving through them, all that can be said is, that the carriage-makers of this quarter must be presumed to know how to adapt their vehicles to the exigencies of the locality; but the jolting is within a shade of dislocation.

Seated pleasantly on the margins of these execrable little cross-roads and bye-lanes, amidst fruitful orchards and luxuriant gardens, are numerous private residences, forming altogether a sort of French Arcadia in the fine weather, but approachable only on horseback, or by means of some stout conveyance in the winter, when the whole district resembles the bottom of a pond before the process of drainage has been quite finished. It might be supposed that the families living in these pretty villas, or demi-châteaux, would at least consult their own ease in an effort to improve their approaches, even if they carried the reform no farther; for they are literally house-bound in the wet weather, and cannot get into the town without being carried by some means over the intervening bogs. Donkeys and ponies are thus put into constant requisition to convey the Arcadians through their suburban mud-tracks, and you may see ladies and gentlemen mounted in this manner, with their legs frequently clasping the necks of their little rough nags, in a desperate strain of the muscles to keep clear of the splashing swamp which rises nearly to the girth of the saddle. But the fact is, that the Arcady of Avranches is (or more correctly was) peopled by birds of passage, who, having no permanent concern in

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the roads, and coming here not to spend money, but to save it, are not much disposed to lay down footpaths and highways for the convenience of their successors. Some attempts have been made to get up a subscription for the purpose, but they failed, partly from want of co-operation on the part of the farmers (whose interest in local improvements is diminished every day by the operation of the law for regulating the distribution of landed property),* and

* The change which the law of property underwent at the Revolution has had the most injurious effect not only on the cultivation of the soil, but upon the social condition of France. Estates could have been bequeathed by will, or tied up by entail, before that time. At the Revolution, the power of making a will was restricted within stipulated limits. If there was one child, the testator could will away only one half of his property; if two, only a third; if three, only a fourth; and so on, the remainder falling in equal shares to the children, male and female. If a proprietor died intestate, his whole property was to be divided equally amongst his children. The intention of this law was to cut up the old aristocracy; but it has still more effectually cut up the material interests of the people. The subdivision of land which has ensued upon these arrangements has gradually deprived the proprietary class of the means of cultivating their property in the best and most profitable manner, and is rapidly reducing the increasing agricultural population to pauperism. The accumulation of wealth, and its attendant benefits in the improvement of the arts of life, can no longer be looked for in a country whose internal resources are thus wasted, and wasting from day to day. The towns participate in the spreading decay of the surrounding districts, and the tradesman, like the farmer, is dragged down to the bare point of subsistence, and may consider himself a fortunate man if he can sustain himself there. Some notion may be formed of the practical results of this law of subdivision from the fact, affirmed by the government returns, that in twenty years, from 1815 to 1835, the number of separate properties increased from 10,083,751 to 10,893,528, and that of these nearly one-half were assessed at the lowest land-tax, namely, less than five francs a year! Considering the ratio at which population advances, and the resubdivision of land consequent upon it, we may conclude that the day is not far distant when the surface of France will be covered by the most indigent population in Europe. As it is, the number of proprietors may be estimated at considerably more than one-half of the total number of the inhabitants—a

partly from that want of unanimity amongst the English residents, which may be set down as an unfailing characteristic of all the little communities formed by our countrymen on the continent.

It is a strange thing that we cannot agree amongst ourselves in settlements which we select for our own convenience, and where it is so essential to our comfort to promote cordiality and good-fellowship. But an Englishman carries with him, wherever he goes, two obstinate antipathies: first, a disrelish, or contempt, for everything that is *not* English; second, a freezing suspicion and distrust of everything that *is*. He moves in a repellant atmosphere, shuts himself up in a crust of prejudices, and has a way of disdaining the people, whose resources he has come to eat up, and at the same time of shunning his own countrymen, which is irreconcilable with common sense. He dislikes the French because they are French, and avoids the English because they are English. Such is literally the logic of his national aversions. In places like

proportion such as no country in the world ever exhibited before; and a still more striking evidence of the retrogressive effect of the law upon the social, intellectual, and industrial condition of the people may be drawn from the additional fact, that upwards of two-thirds of the whole population are dependent upon agricultural pursuits for their daily subsistence. It is not very susprising, therefore, in a country languishing under such depressing influences, to find the rudest and cheapest contrivances resorted to, horses harnessed with ropes, lanes and bye-roads left to take care of themselves, corn threshed by the hoofs of cattle, and ploughs in daily use similar in construction to those which are described by Virgil! Nor is it in this respect alone the law has operated injuriously. The desire to evade its provisions has produced demoralising and disastrous results, such as, in some instances, marrying in and in to bind up and concentrate properties, and, in still greater number of cases, seeking an escape in concubinage from the legal penalties of wedlock.

Avranches, which are selected on the common ground of cheapness, this latter antipathy shows itself in its most unworthy aspect. An Englishman will have it believed that everybody has come there for economy, except himself; and his conduct implies a sort of superiority over them which must be unintelligible to people like the French, who never suffer such considerations to interfere with their sympathies, or interrupt the flow of social intercourse. The prevailing occupation of a community which thus sits in judgment on itself is scandal of the meanest kind. Each individual seems to think the depreciation of other people's characters indispensable to the elevation of his own. He shines by the force of contrast. He makes out his case, not upon its own merits, but by damaging the case of the gentleman over the way. Next-door neighbours supply the whole business of life. They cannot dress, dine, walk, without being exposed to an incessant inquisition. Habitual defamation gradually splits up the little colony into factions that have their distinct circles holding no intercourse with the rest, and waging against each other that bitterest of all species of warfare, which, not content with open manifestations of derision and hostility, penetrates to the secrets of households, and strikes its shafts into the core of domestic life.

The English at Avranches appear to have got on, upon the whole, rather better than most other English settlements in France. Latterly, however, fierce animosities broke out amongst them, which were carried to an indecent excess. Two rival clergymen contested the cure of their souls, and the struggle was conducted with a violence on both sides that showed how much our countrymen stood

in need of the Christian instruction they were fighting for. The church itself was desecrated by these unseemly broils, which led at last to scenes of a disgraceful character. But the Revolution has dispersed the combatants, and swept their feuds into oblivion; and of the four or five hundred English who were recently located here, not more than forty or fifty are now remaining.

Few places on the French coast present more decisive attractions to people of limited means than Avranches. An excellent house and garden may be had for thirty pounds a-year; much less, too, if you watch your opportunity, and know how to take advantage of it, or don't mind casting yourself amongst the farmers half a league or so distant from the town. Provisions are in proportion. A small family might live comfortably, and keep a one-horse carriage, upon three hundred a-year. A little farther off on the coast, at the Rocher des Cancales, the native millionaires (as they are pleasantly called) never range above four hundred per annum; and the few who enjoy so vast a fortune are looked upon as great men in their locality.

It would be an idle experiment to invade the cheap habits of Avranches by a show of wealth and ostentation. A Parisian gentleman, some years ago, with the sinister design of overtopping the whole department by the splendour of his *ménage*, built a magnificent house on an elevated *plateau* overlooking the *Jardin des Plantes*, with an observatory on the top, commanding extensive views of Mont St. Michel, the sea, and the country. But his costly design was no sooner completed than he discovered that it was impossible to live in the style he had contemplated.

He found out, when it was too late, that his sumptuous project isolated him from society, and, instead of giving him a supremacy in the frugal circles of Avranches, only condemned him to the penance of living "alone in his glory." He accordingly advertised the house to be let or sold. For a long time it lay vacant. At last an English gentleman ventured to occupy it, but finding it too large for his family and his fortune, speedily threw it up; and there stands the grand house, with its observatory tattered and blistered in the sun, its garden running to seed, its closed shutters and silent *salle*, a striking memorial of the folly of attempting to trespass upon the rigorous economy of Avranches.

There is nothing to attach you to the place except the scenery and the markets. To live in a charming country at a small cost is no doubt a great temptation; but you must look for nothing more. People whose sense of the pleasures of existence is circumscribed within the limits of being able to eat cheaply, drink cheaply, and look out of their windows upon valleys and uplands teeming with woods and cornfields, may be as happy as the day is long in Avranches. They do not lack intellectual enjoyments, and are best off, perhaps, in a place where there are none to be had. But if books are necessary to your happiness, or the intercourse of cultivated minds, you will find Avranches wofully dismal. Art and literature are luxuries not to be obtained here. Mutton, beef, and chickens, may be procured for about a third less than you can get them in England; but, in saving your pocket, you must waste your mind. Whenever anything is attempted here in the shape of a recognition of any loftier qualities than those

that enter into the management of the *cuisine*, it is done in the worst taste, and most ignorant spirit. For instance, they have erected a vulgar colossal statue in the square leading to the Bishop's gardens of one General Valhubert, who was killed at Austerlitz, a hero known only under the shadow of these flattering trees; while the celebrated Huet,* to whose memory they have always been *promising* a statue, has not even an inscription to record his name. The statue of the great unknown Valhubert occupies a more prominent situation than the statue of Henry IV. at Caen. Such are the uncertainties of fame in places like Avranches; such the accidents of popular sculpture.

The scenery about the town may, however, afford some consolation for the intellectual nakedness within. Up the painful lanes you ascend from various points to reach the higher part of the town, you get some splendid views, glimpses of Mont St. Michel, and the far-stretching sands, and the coast as far as Granville; and from the heights—such as the *Jardin des Plantes*, and the desolate hill where the cathedral once stood, and where Henry II. is said to have performed penance on his knees for the murder of Beckett†—there are magnificent varieties in the undulating landscape before you, a vast surface of wooded country, broken by tracts of pasturage and cornfields, streams, high-roads, châteux, and farmhouses. The finest view in the neighbourhood—perhaps in extent the finest

* Huet was a native of Caen, and not of Avranches, as stated in a recent work.

† The circumstantial details of this curious scene are preserved by Baronius.

in Normandy—is from the highest point on the summit of the hills between Avranches and St. Malo. This point commands an immense sweep of valleys on both sides, crowded with features of picturesque interest as far as the eye can reach.

But we must not linger over these scenes. We have yet to explore the ocean fortress of Mont St. Michel.

XIII.

MONT ST. MICHEL.

WHILE other saints are disposed of indifferently on slopes, and plains, and even in the depths of valleys, the chapels dedicated to St. Michael, who is called by the French writers *l'ange chevalier*, are always built on the pinnacles of the highest hills, in the laudable desire of getting as near heaven as possible. The reason of this is, that St. Michael once had a desperate fight with the Devil on the top of a hill; and so miraculous is the ubiquity of the tradition that, wherever one of these chapels points its cross to the skies, it is an established article of faith in the immediate neighbourhood, that it was there, on that identical spot, the aforesaid rencontre took place. The archangel is thus made to do duty on innumerable hill-tops. Brittany is full of St. Michaels, perched up in this way, at Gréves, Faouet, Plélan, Plouray, Carnac, and other places. Nearly all these, to which our own Saint in Cornwall may be added, were erected in imitation of Mont St. Michel, in Normandy, the most celebrated of them all, although itself but an imitation of a similarly consecrated eyrie in Apulia.

When the Mont was selected for this purpose, the access to it presented no difficulties. If tradition may be trusted,

the whole of the surrounding district was then a forest, traversed by a Roman road, which, down to the time of William the Conqueror, crossed the entire line of country as far as Rennes. The encroachments of the sea gradually swept away all traces of the wood and the highway, forming in the course of successive ages that arid bay in the centre of which the rock now rears its picturesque battlements. This invasion of the waters has enhanced the interest of the scene, by isolating the Mont in the midst of a vast desert of sand; and when the tide flows in, and fills the bay, the effect is rendered still more imposing by the appearance of the solitary rock rising darkly out of the waves, its jutting crags tapering to the summit, and crowned with a pointed white chapel, which, at that great height, looks as if it were melting into the sky.

The history of Mont St. Michel has been explored with a sort of monomaniacal enthusiasm. It engrosses the archæological life of Avranches. More books have been written upon it than any living man has ever read; and, like all histories addressed to the fanaticism of the imagination, the greater part of it is pure moonshine. It opens in the fables of Paganism, advances through the miracles of the monkish ages, and only begins to be credible and intelligible when it approaches our own times. A curious chapter might be wrought out of such materials—but, *cui bono?* A repetition of the monstrous absurdities which are common to the early pages of all conventual and ecclesiastical records can no longer amuse the world. People now-a-days are too anxious to escape out of the mists of superstition into the open daylight of historical truth, not to resent every attempt to detain them over pious frauds, which

only insult their understanding. All that is needful to be said about the birth, baptism, and biography of Mont St. Michel, might be written in the waste leaf of a note-book.

The remotest of all the traditions informs us that the Mont was first devoted to a college or temple of Druid priestesses. The French antiquaries, however, are not quite sure about this; and one of them observes, with remarkable *naïveté*, that if the priestesses did not inhabit the spot they might have done worse; for, he adds, "*cela devait être une charmante résidence!*". Agreeably to the usual routine, the Romans turned out the Druids, and were themselves turned out in their turn by the Christians. In 708, Aubert, Bishop of Avranches, built a church on the top, dedicating it, as a matter of course, to the only saint who was entitled to so elevated a distinction. Local tradition, of course, asserts that it was here the archangel encountered Belzebub; but, as local tradition asserts the same fact in reference to all the other Mont St. Michels, the matter clearly resolves itself into a question of local faith. From the time of Aubert forth, the Mont acquired a prodigious reputation for miracles. The most puissant kings and nobles paid visits of penance and curiosity to the shrine of the archangel. Amongst the rest Louis XI. ascended with a great suite, and, by way of recommending himself to the protection of the saint, left behind him a handsome donation of six hundred golden crowns, and instituted on the spot the order of Saint Michel. Long trains of pilgrims used to come on horseback and on foot from all parts of Europe, and after putting up their vows, and paying their tribute, they would retire across the sands in grand procession, decorated with plumes, and cockades, and

scarves, garnished with shells and medals. But reliques and salvation-money were not the only offerings deposited on the altar. Sometimes these holy gifts were varied by bombs and grape-shot; for, throughout the middle ages, the place was sacked, burned, and blown up with as much indifference to its archangelship as if it were an ordinary battery. The chapel, walls, and keep were peppered so unmercifully, that it is wonderful a vestige of them was left standing. Then came the first Revolution, which, taking still less account of sacred things, expelled the monks from their cloud-capped cells, and converted the "*charmante résidence*" into a state-prison, to which purpose it has been devoted ever since.

The legends, which are profusely scattered over the annals of Mont St. Michel, mark distinctly enough its transit through the period of priestly rule, until it finally emerged from the hands of the monks, and was delivered over to military occupation. Lively and accommodating was the faith which gulped down such stories as the following:—Once upon a time a company of pilgrims were wending across the sands, when they suddenly heard the roaring of the sea, and, struck with terror, fled to the shore for their lives. Amongst them was a poor woman in the pains of child-birth, who, finding herself left alone in her extremity, while the waters were rapidly closing round her, applied to Heaven for succour. The Virgin Mary, instead of reproving the woman for joining the expedition under such untoward circumstances, enclosed her in a suit of curtains, and supplied her with a comfortable bed, where she was safely delivered of a son, the obedient sea not venturing to approach the sanctified spot, although it

flooded all the rest of the bay. There are scores of such legends inserted in grave historical works with an air of earnestness no less marvellous than the miracles they relate.

As we get into the chivalric and hard-fighting times, when men depended on bolts, bars, and swords, rather than supernatural interference, the legends acquire some slight illustrative value. They throw, at least, a little colouring of reality into the narrative, and reveal occasional glimpses of the kind of dramas that were acted in these gloomy chambers. The story of Raoul is an instance of this class of legend, in which the human interest outgrows the superstition in which its roots are laid.

Raoul, a handsome fellow, and, as far as circumstances permitted, a young Giovanni in his way, was page to Duke Robert of Normandy, the third son of Henry II. of England. The duke held his court at Ville-Dieu, and it was here Raoul used to carry on his gallantries amongst the pretty wives of the burgesses, gliding about the streets in the dusk of the evenings, peeping in at the windows, and making great havoc with the hearts of the ladies, who, it seems, were ignorant of his quality. All sorts of reports were spread about this strange visitor, who was confidently believed to be no other than the were-wolf in disguise. At last an old woman undertook to solve the mystery; but, being fascinated by his beauty, she made overtures to detain him, which he resisted upon the first sight of the crone's wrinkled face. This was a slight not to be forgiven, and the old woman, raising all the jealous husbands in the town against him, caused him eventually to be seized and carried before the duke, who sent him off the next day as

a prisoner to the keep of Mont St. Michel. It so happened that the gaoler was absent at a cattle-fair, and the handsome page was accordingly consigned to the custody of the gaoler's young wife, Aloise. That Aloise should take pity upon his youth might be expected, and that he should improve his opportunities with her was nothing very surprising. In short, a tender interest grew up between them, such as is not very common between prisoners and their keepers.

The gaoler, in the meanwhile, having finished his business, hastened towards home; but it was dark when he arrived at Avranches, and flood-tide, so that he could not reach Mont St. Michel that night, and was forced to take up his quarters at an *auberge*. While he was enjoying himself at his supper, a shrill voice from behind the fagots called out his name. "It is the old woman of Ville-Dieu," exclaimed the gaoler. "It would be well for you," answered the same voice, "if your wife Aloise were as old;" whereupon she warned him to get home as fast as he could, circumstantially relating to him what was going forward at the donjon; but how she obtained her information has never transpired. The poor gaoler was in a terrible fright, vowed vengeance against the page, and even talked of tempting the waters in a boat that very night, a feat which he knew to be impossible. The old woman, however, put him in possession of a plan by which he was to have satisfaction, and so he waited with as good a grace as he could until daylight.

In the morning the gaoler was early with his wife, and informed her he had received orders to put Raoul to death. Poor Aloise was horribly shocked; but her terror was

appeased by the old woman, who, visiting her secretly, with the most friendly professions, produced a ladder of ropes, by the aid of which she might enable Raoul to effect his escape. This rope-ladder was to be fastened to the bars of the window of the great north gallery, at a certain hour that night, when Aloise was to let Raoul walk in the gallery, under the pretence of exercise; and he was to wait there till he saw a fire lighted on the Roche-aux-Moules, at which time it would be ebb-tide, and by letting himself down over the rocks he could escape on the sands. He would there find friends who would convey him in safety to the land. Aloise wept with delight at the good-nature of the friendly old woman, and did not lose a moment in putting her capital project into execution.

Night came, and Raoul, taking a tender adieu of the beautiful Aloise, watched anxiously for the signal fire. At last it was lighted, and the page committed himself to the rope; the old woman having taken up her station under the walls of the keep, to observe the success of her stratagem. As he rapidly descended, his foot struck against a loose stone, which, tumbling down, fell with a splash into the waters. A cold chill seized upon the heart of poor Raoul. He discovered, when it was too late, that he was the victim of treachery. The old woman, thinking it was Raoul that had fallen into the sea, exultingly cried out, "Ha! ha! the pretty page is gone to the sharks!" —"Not yet, foul witch!" roared out the page, as, hanging by the rope, and planting his foot firmly on the rock, he resolved to wait there till the tide ebbed. Thus foiled in her scheme, the old woman bethought herself of what

was best to be done, and, running round by the postern, she made her way to Aloise. "He is saved! he is saved!" she exclaimed; "and now let us hasten to remove the rope, lest your husband should discover it." They accordingly ascended to the gallery, and Aloise, overjoyed at the escape of her lover, untied the ladder with her own hands. In the next moment, Raoul was dashed against the crags, and, bounding from rock to rock, was precipitated into the gulf below.

The incidents of chivalry, which belong to a later date, are rather better entitled to credit, and develope more strikingly the actual life of the age. At the time when the English were overrunning the whole province, carrying fire and sword into the châteaux of the nobles, and possessing themselves of all the strong places—except Mont St. Michel, whose position rendered it impregnable—the best blood of the country was called into the field; the most heroic sacrifices were made by the people, and the flower of the aristocracy shared in the common danger with the citizens and the peasantry. The whole country became literally a camp, and every man capable of bearing arms abandoned his homestead to fly to the defence of the points menaced by the enemy. Numerous instances are on record of the devotion of the Normans throughout those stormy times, of which not the least memorable and romantic is that of Robert de Beauvoir.

When Mont St. Michel was besieged by the English with a formidable army in the beginning of the fifteenth century, the seigneurs of the soil entered into a solemn league to defend it to the last drop of their blood, an extremity to which they bound themselves by an oath on

the Evangelists. The young de Beauvoir was one of the members of this patriotic compact. The time of his marriage with Guillemette Avenel, a young lady of a proud and ancient house, was approaching, but the imperative necessities of the country overruled all personal considerations. On parting, the lovers exchanged vows, which were ratified at the termination of the siege. Three years passed away, and the English continued to harass the garrison, which was still pent up in the fortress, and unable to hold any communication with the land, except through some rare and fortunate accident. One evening, as Robert de Beauvoir was seated at an open window (still shown on the façade of the ancient abbey), gazing at the stars, upon which at that moment the eyes of his beloved were also fixed, agreeably to an arrangement usual in the days of knighthood, when ladies were so frequently separated from their lovers, an old servitor of the house of Avenel entered the chamber. He had contrived to make his way through the lines of the besiegers at no little peril to his life, and was the bearer of a letter from Guillemette, in which she announced that Nicholas Burdett, one of the English generals, had demanded her hand in marriage; and that her mother, whose domains were at the mercy of the invaders, had given her reluctant consent. "*Mais,*" added the devoted *fiancée,* "*comme cela ne se peut pas, comme je suis à toi, je crois bien que je serai morte auparavant.*" The first impulse of de Beauvoir was to rush out into the enemy's camp, and take a summary vengeance upon Burdett; but he was restrained from adopting this frantic step by the recollection of his duty and his oath. He accordingly took the more reasonable course of writing

to Burdett, informing him that the lady was his betrothed, and warning him against the injustice of forcing her into a marriage which she loathed. The threats contained in this missive enraged Burdett; and, sending back an insolent message that the lady would be his wife in two days, he flung down his gauntlet to the page who brought him the letter. In two days, the marriage ceremony was performed in the private chapel at Avenel; but, as the last words were about to be uttered, Guillemette, who had probably taken effectual means to avert the sacrifice, fell dead at the feet of Burdett.

The siege continued for some time longer; at last, the English commander resolved upon a general assault, and had already carried the outworks, when the gates were thrown open, and the French poured out their whole force into the midst of the assailants. De Beauvoir sought Burdett alone in the furious engagement which ensued; but, just as they met lance to lance, the Englishman was cut down by one of the French knights. The tide was now returning, and the besiegers were forced to retreat. Burdett, covered with wounds, was taken prisoner, and carried into the citadel. Robert never left him, hoping by great care to restore his health, so that he might yet have the satisfaction of indulging the revenge he meditated. Every morning a young monk attended upon the prisoner, and at the end of a month he was perfectly recovered. "You are now free," said the monk; "here is your sword: and, for your ransom, I have to request a favour." Burdett promised to grant whatever he asked. "Being only a poor servant of God," said the monk, "ignorant of the use of arms, and having an injury to avenge, I require of

you that you should take vengeance for me upon my enemy. You must swear to do this to the death. You will not have far to seek him: he will come voluntarily to meet you, two days' journey from hence, near the chapel of Plaine-Seuvre, in the suburbs of Vire. You will recognise him by his black armour, his shield emblazoned in crimson, and a silver poinard." Burdett pledged himself, as the price of his liberty, to revenge the wrongs of the monk, to whose care he was indebted for his life.

Some time had elapsed after this scene, when two young knights in black armour, one of them carrying a crimson shield and a silver poinard, were seen slowly passing under the walls of Vire. He who was without a shield was the knight who had wounded Burdett in the *mêlée* at Mont St. Michel. At last they reached the lonely chapel of Plaine-Seuvre, a savage spot, which the superstitions of the peasantry peopled with malicious genii. Soon afterwards Burdett appeared moving through the trees, followed by five pages leading a superb courser. Not a word was spoken on either side. Selecting a place for the combat, the adversaries advanced upon each other. The struggle was of short duration. Burdett fell under the furious assault of his opponent, who, placing his foot upon the neck of the prostrate Englishman, raised his visor, and displayed the features of the monk. "Recognise me, and die!" he exclaimed; "thou, who hast desolated the heart of a young girl; thou, who hast killed Guillemette Avenel!" and he plunged his poinard three times into his throat. From that day Robert de Beauvoir forsook the profession of arms, and became a monk of the monastery of Mont St. Michel.

XIV.

LIFE ON THE ROCK.

THE danger of crossing the sands to Mont St. Michel has been egregiously exaggerated. Tourists have a way of confounding their sensations with the objects which produce them; and out of this perpetual recurrence to self spring the chief errors and fallacies we find in books of travels. The writers rarely judge of circumstances by their relation to each other, but by their relation to themselves. Thus one traveller, who believes himself to be strictly impartial and discriminating, never can get anything to eat in a country where some millions of people dine luxuriously every day in the year; and another, put out of his way by the vivacity of the people, attributes it all to hollowness and levity. Excesses on the other side, with a little unconscious vanity in them, may be traced to the same source. The sense of pleasure or of peril sets up the slightest incidents in a *mirage* of the imagination; a common-place satisfaction is vented in a rhapsody, and an ordinary adventure expanded into an exploit. The tourist makes the whole scene about him subordinate to his own importance, and becomes insensibly the hero, instead of the artist of the picture. It is in this heroic way the hazards of the approach to Mont St. Michel have been so

ridiculously over-stated. Hazard, of course, there is; but it may be easily avoided, if people will only exercise their common sense.

There are three routes from Avranches to the Mont, varying in length and in the extent of strand to be traversed. By one of these routes, the shortest, you have a league and a half of the sands to cross; by another, the longest, only half a league. This latter route, which looks the most tempting, is the least desirable, and should not be undertaken without good information as to the state of the strand, which is here intersected by numerous deep channels of flowing water, sometimes so swollen by the action of the tide as to become nearly impassable. Returning by this route, we saw the track of the commandant's carriage, which had crossed in that direction in the morning, and concluded, therefore, that we were tolerably safe; yet our horses were forced to wade up to their girths in the gullies that lay between us and the shore. If a traveller were to trust to his own judgment in crossing these streams, he might possibly be swallowed up; but men who are well acquainted with the peculiarities of the surface, and who almost live in the water, are stationed here to pilot you over for the trifling consideration of a few sous, and it is clearly your own fault if you are swamped or drowned. In no case is it necessary, whichever route you select, to cross on foot. The strand is practicable for carriages up to the base of the Mont.

The whole secret of the danger is susceptible of a very simple explanation. During spring-tide Mont St. Michel is an island, approachable only when the tide has receded; during neap-tide it is always accessible. Now, the actual

danger exists only in the former case. The traveller, who has not taken the obvious precaution of calculating time and distance, and who, midway in the sands, sees the sea rising and advancing upon him, will find himself in a situation of imminent peril. Conscious of danger, he strains every nerve to reach the shore; but he who has committed himself to so fearful a risk, can have no adequate notion of its real extent. The sea gains so rapidly upon him, in consequence of the openness of the shore, and the great number of channels through which the water rushes in, that all chances of escape are cut off, nor is it in the power of any human being to afford him the slightest aid. In this dreadful extremity he must perish in sight of land, and under the very eyes of the inhabitants of the Mont. But nobody perishes in this way. The danger is well understood and carefully avoided. The necessity of endeavouring to provide some means of succour in such cases has not been overlooked, and within the last few years two life-boats have been established here, one anchored on the sands, and the other kept in the town. Of what avail they would be in the fury of the in-coming sea has not yet, I believe, been tested.

The fishermen who spend the greater part of their lives on these desolate sands smile at the notion of danger. They are constantly out, far out seaward, and accidents rarely occur even in that direction, although the risk is proportionally increased by the distance to which these people are carried in the prosecution of their business. The day I visited the Mont two of the children of one of these hardy fellows had wandered away upon the strand, forgetting to note how far they had gone, so as to leave

themselves time to get back before the return of the tide. Occupied in their daily toil of exploring for shell-fish, they were already a long way beyond the point of safety when they saw the tide breaking afar off, the white waves rippling against the sun, a token which, however remote and indistinct, they well understood. They turned to the shore and fled. But they could not fly as fast as the ocean, which now, roaring behind them, followed with violent rapidity. The poor children, clasping each other's hands, and almost overpowered by terror, still struggled forward. The rush of the waters was in their ears, their heads grew dizzy, their home on the rock swam and danced before their eyes. Still they pressed on, mechanically, blindly; but in vain. The waves gained upon them, and the boiling spray fell about them in showers. The girl's strength and resolution forsook her. Fear and horror had paralysed her limbs, and, unable to proceed, she summoned one great effort, and entreated her brother to abandon her, to save himself, and leave her to her fate. But the brave little fellow refused. His courage rose as hers fell. Seizing her arm, he dragged her along by force. His new responsibility inspired him with new vigour. The sea itself could scarcely travel with greater speed than the feet of that heroic boy. Cheering her as well as he could, and singing songs to make light of the danger, while his heart sank within him at every step, he dragged her for a distance of two leagues, until he reached the foot of the rock, where depositing his charge in safety, he gave way to the emotion of terror which love, up to that moment, had enabled him to suppress.

A worse danger than the approach of the sea lurks

under the feet of the tourist who ventures to cross these sands without a competent guide. The constant action of numerous hidden springs has so effectually disturbed the surface as to produce, in some places, what are called shifting sands. It is impossible to distinguish them by external signs, and they are of such depth that, according to some of the historians of the place, scarcely a year passes that a vessel is not engulfed in them, sinking lower and lower with each retreating tide, until at length even the tips of the masts disappear. A few years ago a bridal party, going upon an excursion to the Mont, happened to drive upon one of these fatal spots, and instantly went down into the abyss, the sand closing over them like quicksilver. Such accidents, however, cannot occur under the conduct of a guide to whom the geography of the bay is familiar.

The only remaining risk to which you are exposed is from the fogs which sometimes set in suddenly, with such density that you cannot discern your horse's head. Formerly, the luckless wayfarer, thus paralysed in the midst of the sands, was enabled to speculate upon the direction he ought to take by the sounds of the abbey bell, ringing out from the summit of the Mont; but the bell is now mute, and he must trust to his good genius in picking his steps through the black mist by which he is surrounded, or run the risk of waiting till it disperses. Some notion may be formed of the extraordinary density of these fogs, from a circumstance which befel M. Martin, the director of the works, who, towards the close of his journey, on a very hot day, was surprised on the sands by a fog which suddenly blotted out the sun, and turned a

bright sultry day into dark night. After walking by the side of his horse for a quarter of an hour, he thought he heard, on his left hand, the distant sound of a tambourine. He stopped and listened. Hearing the same sound still more distinctly, he turned in that direction, and in a few steps arrived in front of a door. Unable, however, to distinguish either the rock or the buildings above, he called out for his servant in a loud voice. "Here I am, sir," replied the servant. "How, rascal!" replied M. Martin; "you knew I should come home to dinner, you see the fog, and you come without a lantern." "I beg your pardon, sir," returned the servant, "I have one in each hand."

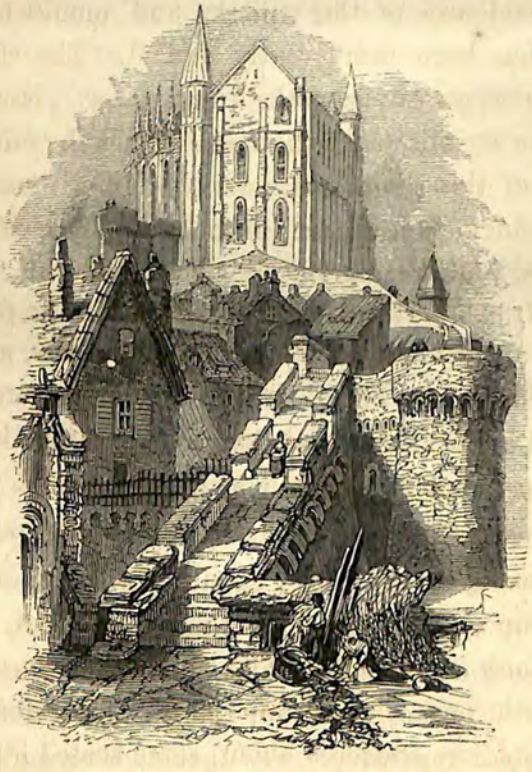
Having made the excursion, and taken some pains to ascertain the nature of the risks of which I had heard such vague and alarming accounts, I have no hesitation in saying that the worst part of the route lies through the lanes and cross roads, through which you must pass to gain the beach. If you are not totally shattered in the ruts, you may look forward with perfect satisfaction and security to the rest of the journey. The drive across the sands, especially if the day happen to be fine, is unquestionably the most agreeable part of the whole.

Arriving at the foot of the stupendous rock, your attention is drawn to two large cannons, with great stones in their mouths, which you are told were taken from the English in the sortie in which Robert de Beauvoir was engaged. The fact that they had not been discharged is assumed as a conclusive proof that they must have been taken by the French. It is hardly worth a dispute; but it would be a more candid conjecture to infer that

OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC

the English were obliged to leave them behind when the approach of the sea compelled the troops to make a precipitate retreat.

The appearance of the Mont, as you stand at its base, is grand and picturesque. The town which scales the cliffs on the land side is buried behind fortified walls built up direct from the sands; and above the town rise fresh tiers of naked rocks, over which there is another series of fortifications, and, crowning them all, on the apex of the rock, stands the church, whose light masonry seems to mix with the clouds.



Ascending the broken steps by which you climb into the town, you are assailed by a triad of fish-wives, who

act as guides to the summit. These haggard women, who have the aspect of witches of the sea, are not only barbarously ignorant of all the interesting points of the place, but speak in a horrid jargon which it is nearly impossible to comprehend. It is idle to complain, or to look for more intelligent conductors, for there are no other guides to be had. Winding laboriously up the narrow shelving streets, pausing now and then on the battlements to look out upon the country and the sea, and passing under one or two quaint old arches, we finally reach the château or monastery, for it has served both purposes, and bears palpable evidences of the military and monkish uses to which it has been indifferently applied. The château is completely separated from the town below. None of the inhabitants are allowed to ascend beyond the entrance to the Hall of the Chevaliers, now the guard-house. The guide conducts you so far, and, seating herself on the stone steps, waits very patiently till you return.

The entrance to the Hall is a sight not to be forgotten. It carries us back at once to the feudal times, and in its living incidents realises their modes and pictures. The lofty flight of steps in front, the mighty arch that spans the entrance, under the heavy shadows of which you continue to ascend, till you reach the large and gloomy hall, with its massy stone stairs within, its forest of pillars springing up on both sides to the vaulted roof, its small windows sunk in the deep walls, and its ponderous doors clouded with huge iron clamps;—fill this interior with groups of soldiers scattered about, some seated idly on the stone stairs, others engaged in earnest conversation, and some moving up and down with slow and measured step,

as if they could not get the monotonous parade out of their heads, and you have an accurate scenic representation of a stronghold of the middle ages, even to the iron men, whose presence enhanced the romance of its terrors. Nor is this impression likely to be disturbed by the figure of a soldier, bearded like a pard, who, with a stern air, advances to demand your passport.

There are two hundred soldiers stationed here. They have a barrack on the cliffs, where they practise firing at a target, and from whence they draw the sentries and guards necessary for the surveillance of the prison above. On the side facing the sea you are shown the place where half-a-dozen prisoners made their escape some years ago —one of them successfully; and it is enough to make the stoutest heart quail merely to look downwards at the terrible and almost perpendicular steep where this achievement was accomplished. Here, at this spot, precipitous and gigantic rocks are piled up in masses beneath the stupendous walls of the highest part of the castle, close to where the common prisoners are taken out daily at a certain hour to walk—a point of such fearful elevation, that it is difficult to understand how the bare conception of selecting it for the purpose of attempting an escape could have occurred to the most desperate man.

There are two classes of prisoners in the château, the state criminals and minor delinquents. They are kept carefully apart, the former being prohibited from all intercourse with strangers, not even being allowed to be seen, unless you get an accidental glimpse of the head of one of them glancing past the lofty windows of the apartment where they are consigned for exercise. Sometimes the

other prisoners, probably when they have earned a little favour by special good conduct, are suffered to descend into the town, under an escort, by way of relaxation, for an hour or so; but as the town consists of nothing more than a few ragged streets, on the face of the rock on the land side, the side next the sea being a blind fortification to the summit, the enjoyment of the privilege is scanty enough. Slight, however, as the change is, to breathe the air of this miserable town, it is a change of some importance to the wretched prisoners. It rescues them for a brief interval from the dreadful monotony and incessant labour of the château above, and gives them a consolatory peep into the lower world of action and liberty—such as it is.

When I visited Mont St. Michel, there were altogether five hundred prisoners confined in the château. Many of them were allowed the indulgence of occupying a portion of their time in those ingenious works for which "French prisoners," time out of mind, have been justly celebrated. Their skill is chiefly employed upon cocoa-nuts, from the shells of which they contrive to form elegant little articles for the toilet and the boudoir; egg-cups, prettily carved, vases of graceful and classical shapes, rings, bracelets, pendants, and ornaments in endless varieties of outline and workmanship. These articles are sold at the entrance to the town, in the only *auberge* the place rejoices in, and from the exorbitant prices demanded for them on behalf of the poor artists, it is much to be feared that the urgent hostess puts the largest share of the profits into her own pocket.

A grotesque memorial of the ingenuity of a prisoner

who was pent up here for some twenty or thirty years is exhibited as a great curiosity. It is a meretricious figure of St. Michael killing the dragon, said to have been carved with a penknife, and to have occupied six months in the execution. The poor fellow, in the hope of propitiating the authorities, presented it to the little church of the town. For this act of devotion he was released, but when he left his cell, after so long a period of estrangement from the world, there was not a solitary friend or familiar face to greet him.

The prisoners work in one part of the château, and sleep in another, higher up. The dormitories are remarkably clean, and kept in excellent order. The works carried on are extensive, and the visitor cannot fail to be struck with the practical uses to which such a mass of human energy, redeemed from crimes and vices, is thus profitably applied. But it is impossible, as a matter of taste, not to recoil from the barbarous destruction of the architecture which the accommodation of all this convict industry appears to have rendered unavoidable. The monastery, and even the church itself, have been cut up into a sort of house of correction, and so subdivided that it is only by a strong effort of the imagination, assisted by a scrap of a pillar or a section of an arch here and there, you can conjure up an idea of the structure as it stood in its original entirety. The beautiful Hall of the Chevaliers is choked with cotton-looms, and otherwise grievously mutilated by having a temporary passage partitioned off at one side which totally mars the unity of the design. The only part of the whole which has been spared from desecration is that which is appropriated to the cloisters, but this is

worth all the rest. The tranquillity of these aerial aisles, sleeping sweetly in the air at this great height above the stir of the lower world, fills the mind with an inexpressible feeling of monastic repose. They form a quadrangle, with triple rows of pillars, intersected by delicate pointed arches. It is impossible to convey an adequate notion of the stillness which reigns over the scene, and which in its complete abstraction seems as if it were literally seated in the heavens. The only sounds that ever break the solemn silence of the cloisters are the footsteps of the state prisoners who are occasionally permitted to exercise here.

Amongst the political *détenus*, who were here at the time of my visit, were some of the men who took a conspicuous part in the Revolution of July, or rather in the republican and legitimist movements which followed it. Of these the most notorious were La Houssage, Mathieu, Blanqui, and Barbès, who attempted the life of Louis Philippe, and who has since distinguished himself by acts no less violent and outrageous. Barbès was then a man of about twenty-eight years of age, of a remarkably mild expression of countenance; but inspired with daring energy and resolution. He glorified in the crime for which he was condemned to death, and for which he must have been executed but for the clemency of the royal family, who interested themselves on his behalf. A romantic story had got about, that his sister had come to live on the rock, in order to be near him; but there was not a word of truth in it. She had never seen him from the moment he was placed in confinement. She exerted herself zealously, however, to procure a mitigation of his sentence, and

M. Hugo supported her prayers to the throne in the following lines:—

"Au Roi Louis-Philippe.
Par votre ange envolée ainsi qu'une colombe!
Par ce royal enfant, doux et frêle roseau!
Grace encore une fois, grace au nom de la tombe!
Grace au nom du berceau!"

To Barbès himself is attributed a couplet put into the mouth of his sister:—

"Oh! bon geôlier, laissez-moi voir mon frère,
C'est de pain blanc que je veux lui donner."

Poetry, it seems, is by no means a stranger to these dungeons, and some of the prisoners have consoled themselves by venting their sorrows in verses which, if not remarkable for their skill, are at least interesting from the circumstances in which they originated. The popular *chanson* beginning with

"Hirondelle gentille
Qui voltige à la grille
Du prisonier,"

is ascribed by M. Héricher to a captive in these dungeons. Mathieu, one of the state criminals, who was confined here with Barbès, published a collection of pieces, entitled "Mes Nuits au Mont St. Michel." They are deeply coloured by the miserable reflections incidental to the penitentiary cell, of which the following stanza from an ode may serve as a specimen:—

"Ange aux ailes d'azur, ne te verrai-je plus?
Un amer souvenir, des regrets superflus
Seraient-ils la fin mes rêves?
N'est-il plus d'autre espoir qu'une mort sans réveil?
Oh! non, car je te vois, dans mon demi-pommeil,
Onduler au-dessus des grèves."

The life of the soldiers appears to be almost as dismal as that of the prisoners. They never move beyond the stipulated precincts, and are, in fact, as closely confined as the criminals under their charge. One naturally asks how they contrive to keep up the supply of the necessaries of life, seeing that no intercourse whatever is allowed with the world below. It is done in this way: there is a sort of slide, or duct, built down the side of the rock, by which baskets are lowered and raised, and provisions conveyed to the castle through a window. One's head gets giddy in gazing at the tremendous descent. It is a fearful piece of work, this lowering and drawing up of baskets, and the prisoners are put to do it, under the superintendence of a guard. Of course the men are carefully selected, for it presents a tempting opportunity for a desperate fellow to dash out his brains in a fit of madness. As there are no such luxuries as springs at so great a height, huge cisterns, in which they collect the rain-water, are made to answer the purpose, and, by a strict economy of this precious element, they manage to supply the wants of their eleven hundred inhabitants. But in case of siege or dry weather, we inquired of our gruff military guide, what would be done? "We should filter salt water," he replied, with the imperturbability of a soldier who is never put out of countenance by a difficulty.

The number of residents in the town may be estimated at about four hundred. With the exception of six clerks who are attached to the civil service, and three women who act as guides, all these people live by the fisheries. The trade is perilous enough, and is carried on at a cost of labour out of all proportion to its scanty profits; yet it is

found to be sufficient for their support in the wretched way in which they are accustomed to live. When they have made a haul of fish, of which there are all varieties in these waters, they carry their spoils to a certain rendezvous, at a distance of two leagues, where the market-people meet them. The journey to Avranches is thus divided midway between the fishermen and their wholesale customers.

These people are in reality as much cut off from the world as if they dwelt in one of the monasteries of La Trappe. There are only certain times when they can approach the shore; but the distance between them and all human habitations is too great to admit of the frequent indulgence of such an enjoyment. Indeed, their extreme poverty leaves them no leisure for enjoyments of any kind. The consequence is, that they hold little intercourse with the outer world beyond that which is indispensable to enable them to carry on their business. Their lives are literally passed on the waters, the sands, and the rock. Men are born and die here who see no more of this green earth. Children are brought up here in boats and nets, and from the cradle to the grave have no further knowledge of the uses of language, the culture of their powers, or the habitudes of the social state, than is barely necessary to feed their animal wants. To labour and die are the sole ends for which they are born. Yet they seem to live with an abundant contentment in their own way, so miraculously does nature adapt us to the exigency of circumstances. Such of the women as remain within doors to attend to domestic duties are as happy as birds; and you may hear them chattering and singing all day

long as they watch their rude cradles, rocked by any contrivances that will spare their hands, which are usually busily employed in mending nets, or patching the rent garments of the absent fishermen. All sorts of resources are brought to bear for keeping up the animal economy on the rock. Some of the old dungeons scooped in the naked stone are let out for various uses; one of them has been converted into a tolerably commodious *magazin de bois*. The houses are dark and shallow, scaling the sides of the precipice, and presenting a repulsive and forlorn appearance; yet the inmates, to do them justice, throw off as much as they can of this air of misery, by establishing little scraps of flower-beds here and there, and planting roses which climb prettily up rickety trellises, in spots where we should look for anything else in nature rather than the grace of flowers.

XV.

THE BRIDGE OF PONTORSON.

About five leagues, or so, from Avranches, on the road to St. Malo, we reached the frontier of Brittany—the Armorica of the ancients. The difference of aspect at this point between the two provinces is quite as sudden, and almost as remarkable, as one feels in ascending out of the sunny plains of Italy into the wintry track of the Simplon. But we must linger a few moments on the tattered bridge of Pontorson—the last Norman village, before we take leave of the luxuriant districts through which our course has hitherto lain.

This Pontorson consists of a mysterious heap of huts, half-buried in a bed of drifting sands. It is built at the embouchure of a river called the Couësnon, and occupies the point of the most inland creek of the bay of Mont St. Michel. The bridge over this river marks the boundary between the two provinces. Sometimes in the winter the river overflows the surrounding swamps and flats, reducing the inhabitants to a state of domestic existence analogous to that of Holland, as depicted by Butler:—

> "A country that draws fifty foot of water,
> In which men live as in the hold of nature."

Of Pontorson it may be said with equal propriety, that it is

> "A place that rides at anchor, and is moored,
> In which men do not live, but go aboard."

It was once a place of strength, and had a château hung round with threatening battlements, which shook the thunders of war from their fiery heights; but at present it more nearly resembles a nest of marauders, who had seized upon a bleak and untenantable spot on the coast, where they might carry on their maritime speculations without much risk of interference. It is like the wreck of a marine village, made up of little, dark, smoke-dried dens, leaning against fragments of old walls, and shouldering each other as if they were drunk, the doorways choked with sand; the windows mere black recesses amongst stones and rubbish; and the roofs of shingles, particles of which are momentarily lifted by the wind and whirled into your face, making a sensible variety in the hurricane of small gritty powder which prevails in these latitudes. The vestiges of antiquity which were formerly to be seen here are now either destroyed or blotted out by the sands and the hovels. Nothing remains but the dilapidated ruins of the old church, which was built by the father of William the Conqueror, but which has been so patched in subsequent times that the body is the only relique of the whole which seems to belong to that early period. There is not a single memorial left of the history of Pontorson except this church and the indestructible river into which the luckless ladies of the wife of Du Guesclin were thrown in sacks, for plotting the escape of the Englishman, Felton, from

the château, in the fourteenth century. The river still flows, the château is gone, and we are forced to fill up the hole in the ballad as well as we can by the help of imagination.

A long gaze back into Normandy from the crest of this beggarly bridge sets one involuntarily thinking about the traditions and characteristics of the race whose picturesque valleys we are now about to quit for the stony plains of Brittany.

Of all the varieties which enter into the composite of modern France, the Normans are most akin to us in habits and feelings. There is reason for this in the intercourse, friendly and hostile, which for ages past was maintained between the two races. The Normans sent us a line of kings, with trains of followers, whose leaders established themselves in all parts of the kingdom, mixing their blood, names, and usages with our Anglo-Saxon population. We, in return, from time to time overran their province, besieged their chief cities, held possession of the Seine and its forts, made pacts and intermarriages with them, and blended the two races on their soil, as they had already blended them on our own. The English of those days probably caught something of the French gaiety from the Normans, and the Normans acquired increased gravity and steadiness of purpose from the English. Perhaps the finest race of men in the world was that, which, living close to the time of transition, directly inherited this happy combination; and the finest stocks by which they have been succeeded are those to whom it has descended in different proportions—the Norman and the Englishman of to-day.

The seriousness of the Norman is the characteristic which distinguishes him from all other Frenchmen. It is not to be traced exclusively to their early subjection by the Saxons. They are more serious than the Saxons themselves, with a reserve of vivacity which helps to set off their superabundant earnestness. The history of Normandy exhibits a succession of calamities and humiliations, which sufficiently explains how it was that the people grew into this habit of gravity. The Saxons first, then the Romans, then the Saxons again, swarmed into this country, and held it by the sword. Here were elements of gravity enough to supply a national temperament for a thousand years. Then came the Franks, and then the English, to shut out more of their sunshine, so that the Normans, through whatever changes we regard them, have invariably had to do with the most saturnine and hard-headed of conquerors and rulers. For centuries they never enjoyed a single interval of repose; it was a sanguinary struggle from the beginning to the end. Their most prosperous cities were sacked and demolished; they had to contest their pastures inch by inch; they were hunted like stags over their own domains. This was not a way of life likely to generate light hearts and sprightly tempers. Nor did the conquest of England contribute to spiritualise them: it only gave them a zest for plunder and aggrandisement, and cast a fierce, rather than a lively glow over their character. The invasion of Normandy by the English made the matter worse. The reverses they suffered during these roving campaigns completely broke them down, and rendered them sullen and distrustful. All these incidents of their history must be

added together, to explain the French anomaly of Norman gravity. The wonder is that they did not become morose and depraved.

And out of this succession of crushing events sprang other peculiarities, for which the Normans are noted—their reserve and their litigiousness. It is next to an impossibility to prevail upon a Norman to give you a promise. He will never undertake positively to do anything; he will never directly commit himself; there will always be an escape through some evasion in the expression, or some safe condition. "Yes" and "no" are not in his vocabulary. We see in this clearly enough that habitual caution which is the offspring of wrongs and deceptions. The Norman has dealt too much with people who have taken dishonest advantage of his pledges, or broken their own, not to speak guardedly, and, as it were, under protest, even on the smallest occasion. As to his litigiousness, that, too, is the fruit of oppression and violence. No man is so fond of a law-suit as your Norman. The experience of so much robbery by the sword left him no appeal but to the civil tribunal. The law was his last resource, and his only protection; and the habit outlived the necessity. Besides, in a country where property has so often changed hands under the shadow of aggressive flags, all notions of rights in the soil become confused and obscure. Hence grew endless occasions of litigation, false claims, with strong hands to enforce them, and legacies of lawsuits left to be scrambled for by one generation after another, who naturally inherit, with the grounds of dispute, the passion for gambling over the spoils.

Like their cousin-Germans, the Normans are a studious

people. Their earnestness is not a mere affair of constitution; it is the outward sign of a thoughtful and inquiring habit of mind. They are devotedly fond of reading; and avail themselves with avidity of all possible opportunities of poring over every volume they can put their hands upon. The stranger in Caen or Rouen will discover this ruling passion as he saunters along the streets, if he will take the trouble to peep into the shops. Wherever the tradespeople happen for a moment to be relieved from their business, he will find them engaged on a book of some sort; and this resource is common to all ages and to both sexes. Even little boys, of eleven or twelve, may be seen perched upon high stools, with their elbows planted firmly on the counters, and their eyes buried in an old tome—perhaps, for all we know, the Roman de Rou!

XVI.

ROUTE TO ST. MALO.

CLEARING the Norman hills, and leaving their rich woods behind us, we now get down amongst the Breton farmers, who grow tobacco and beet-root, and depend chiefly upon apples, and such crops as they can cultivate in their orchards. These farms are industriously tended, yet they have a ragged air, arising from the vicissitudes to which their situation exposes them. Midway between Pontorson and St. Malo, there rises up out of the marshes a conical mountain, surmounted by a telegraph. This is Mont Dol, famous only for being the central point of the operations of the local administration, to whose guardianship the dykes of this neighbourhood are confided. Extending for a considerable sweep round this place, the properties of the farmers are enclosed and protected by a network of dykes and flood-gates. Such farms as have been drained and redeemed are said to be exceedingly fertile, and the land is particularly luxuriant in a species of reed, which grows here without culture, and gives to the fields the appearance of sugar plantations. These reeds are extensively used by the people in covering their houses. The tourist must put all his travelling philosophy in requisition to enable him to bear up against the local

phenomena of this region—floods in winter and dust in summer. Mont Dol is the antithesis of Venice, seeing that in Venice there is no dust, and that here in the fine weather there is nothing else.

While Mont Dol, which is a sort of inland Mont St. Michel, is yet in the distance, you find yourself passing under the crumbling walls of Dol. It is a perfect specimen of an old Breton town. The streets are so narrow, that the projecting arches and quaint arcades, whose pillars and cornices embroider the fronts of the houses, hardly admit the passage of a carriage; and as if the dense population of the place had resolved to increase the difficulty as much as possible, they live out in the open air, squatted upon chairs, not only at their doorways, but in the middle of the causeway, or gathered into groups, like noisy urchins, in loud squabble or riotous play. The little lattice-windows, the black tracery on the façades, the odd, picturesque style of the buildings, the middle-age air of darkness that hangs over the town, and the hustling of people in strange, old-world costumes, furnish the incidents of a picture which carries you back into the mists of many hundred years. The suggestion is greatly assisted, too, by a certain cramped and drawn expression in the faces of the inhabitants, generated partly by poverty and unwholesome food, and partly by the unhealthy atmosphere in which they live.

I am afraid, it must be confessed, that, in the matter of beauty, the swart, hard-featured Bretons must not be compared with their clear-faced, handsome neighbours. In the towns you see them at the worst. Sometimes in the open country one's opinion is a little shaken; but the

pastoral accessories by which they are here surrounded help to make out an ideal, not always improved by too close an inspection. As you drive along the roads, charming faces start up in the corn-fields, where crowds of women are employed in reaping. Their attitudes, as they suspend the action of their arms to gaze after the carriage, are exceedingly striking. These reapers use a small hand-scythe, which, sometimes thrown up in the air, and sometimes struck down to the ground, while they rest from their labour, with their bright, streaming heads looking out earnestly over the corn-flowers, has a very animated effect. The corn in many places is grown in the orchards, under the shadows of which we saw several *tableaux* of this description, realising the most exquisite conceptions of the old masters, when they painted the wood-nymphs sporting in the depths of the forests. I am compelled to acknowledge, however, that before I left this part of the country it was my misfortune to see a few old women, whose transcendant ugliness somewhat lowered my enthusiasm about the poetry of the Breton corn-fields.

Accomplishing a journey of fourteen leagues in six hours and a half, I alighted at the door of the Hôtel de France in St. Malo, just at the moment when the noisiest and most bountiful of *table d'hôtes* was about to develope its hospitality. The fact was announced by the riot and confusion which prevailed within and without; and, above all, by the significant looks of the people who rushed past us into the hall. You could see the dinner in their eyes, and in the haste with which they flew to hang up their hats and caps, and put aside their sticks, swords, and cloaks.

The Hôtel de France is the best in the town; an old,

scrambling place, with sentinels at the gate, guarding the adjoining house of a general,—a dirty yard with a melancholy brown statue in the middle of it of Apollo playing the flute,—a merry set of servants scampering about like demons released for a holiday,—and a landlord with a rose-coloured neckcloth, an English wife, and a volubility of tongue which could not be surpassed even in Brittany, renowned for feasting and roaring. This landlord was a character, and being perfectly aware of the fact, he made the most of it. With the dashing, negligent air of a wit and a *bon vivant*, he managed to pay the strictest attention to business, putting out his pleasant swagger and topping spirits as part of his stock in trade. I was not ten minutes in the house before I was in possession of his whole history, and his wife's history, and the names of her relations in England, and how it was she came to marry an inn-keeper, and what it was they intended to do by-and-by by way of vindicating their gentility. Our host had taken the hotel about the time of the Revolution of 1830, and made a fortune in the interval, and being resolved to retire into private life,—or more correctly, to make a splash and enjoy himself,—had now advertised the establishment for sale. He was very particular in impressing this upon us. He wished us clearly to understand, not only that he was about to become an independent gentleman, but that he had conducted his house all throughout upon gentlemanly principles. Some credit was certainly due to him for the reforms he had introduced, since he had found, like most original reformers, that the work of improvement was a service of danger. Before his time, the hotel admitted everybody indiscriminately; there was

no respect of persons, and men in check-frocks, with cigars in their mouths and bearskin caps on their heads, were as acceptable at the *table d'hôte* as the politest of guests. Our vivacious landlord set himself at once against this indelicate custom; but in shutting his doors upon the mob of miscellaneous customers, he provoked the bitterest hostility amongst the townspeople. The revolution in the hotel was followed by a revolution in the streets. The house was besieged by insurgents,—visitors were scared from its doors,—and the innkeeper and his family were assailed with fierce threats of vengeance. But he was not a man to be turned from his purpose, and he fought his opponents bravely for two years, sleeping every night with pistols under his pillows, to protect himself against the violence of the crowds that used to gather under his windows, shrieking and yelling with as much fury as if they were seeking for satisfaction upon some great political malefactors. At last he wore them out, and succeeded in obtaining quiet and exclusive monopoly of the travelling and local respectability of the town. Having given us a circumstantial narrative of these transactions, he concluded by informing us, in a confidential chuckle, that he had made over all the tag-rag and bobtail to his vulgar neighbour, the Hôtel de la Paix.

St. Malo is the gustiest spot on the whole coast. An eternal squall whistles day and night over the bleak rocks which deform the surface of the sea under its walls. The visitor who attempts a promenade on the ramparts may readily fancy himself on the roof of the Temple of the Winds. You may be blown round them (walking is out of the question) with ease in ten minutes, provided you

relieve yourself of all anxiety about your hat by leaving it behind you, or pitching it into the sea. Of the dismal rocks that are scattered about in the water, several are strongly fortified and garrisoned, and have their own proper names and histories, which you can easily ascertain from the gazetteer, if you have any curiosity on the subject. But who can be expected to have any curiosity about the history of these black precipices, the very sight of which is a sort of ghastly remembrancer of storms and shipwrecks?

The town, or the stony heap on which it stands, is an island, approachable on foot only on one side, where a sort of pier connects it with the main land. It was once, like the other rocks in its vicinity, covered, or nearly covered, with water; and by way of leaving a pious memorial to posterity of its deliverance from the flood, the monks have turned the first house that was built upon it into a chapel. So completely is this little iron-cage of a town shut up in foam and brine, that even the faubourg of St. Servan used to be difficult of access, except during ebb, when the harbour was dry. The establishment of a *bassin à flot* has, however, greatly facilitated the means of intercourse. St. Servan is the English quarter of St. Malo, and is said to have had a population of upwards of 10,000 souls, before the late panics drove the English out of the country.

Chateaubriand was born here in the house which is now the Hôtel de France, and from its windows may be seen his tomb, erected by his fellow-citizens, on the little rock or island of Grand Bay, a spot selected by himself as his final resting-place. "The house in which my parents resided," he tells us in his memoir, "was situated in a

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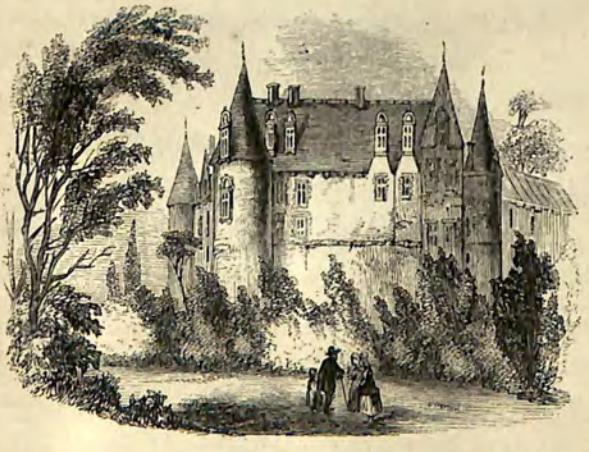
narrow and gloomy street of St. Malo, called the Jew's Street; it is now turned into an inn. The room in which my mother was confined overlooked a solitary part of the town wall, and from the windows the sea was seen stretching as far as the eye could reach, with the waves breaking on rocks."

It was from St. Malo Chateaubriand departed for the family château of Combourg on that "happiest day of his life" which he so touchingly describes in his memoirs. Combourg is eleven leagues from St. Malo across the marshes of Dol, and away in the interior of the country. He thus describes his arrival at the château:—"Issuing from the obscurity of the wood, we crossed a forecourt planted with nut-trees, adjoining the house and garden of the steward. Thence we proceeded by a beaten road to a verdant lawn called 'La Cour Verte.' To the right was a long row of stables and a clump of chestnuts; and to



the left, was another cluster of these noble trees. At the further extremity of the lawn, the ground gradually

ascended, and the château rose between two clumps of trees. The stern and melancholy façade presented a curtain with a narrow, covered, denticulated gallery. This curtain united two towers, unlike in age, material, height, and size. The towers were surmounted by pinnacles, above which rose a pointed roof, with a cap placed upon a Gothic crown. A grated window appeared here and there upon the naked wall. A large flight of steps, straight and steep, twenty-two in number, without rails or balustrades, replaced the ancient drawbridge over the moat which had been filled up; it led to the portal of the château, in the middle of the curtain. Above this portal were the arms of the Lords of Combourg, and the loopholes from which the chains and rests of the drawbridge formerly issued. The carriage stopped at the foot of the grand staircase."

XVII.

THE RANCE.

The little passage from St. Malo to Dinan up the river Rance, a distance of about fifteen miles, is performed by a light steam-boat, which, owing to the navigation, is compelled to proceed at a leisurely rate through some of the most picturesque scenery of France. The vessel is always obliged to wait for the tide, and can seldom accomplish the trip up and down in one day more than three times a week. Such is the shallowness of the river, that the stream is artificially sustained near Dinan by the help of a lock.

The banks of the Rance may be compared to a variety of pretty pastoral spots, mixed up with wild rocks, picked out of Switzerland and looked at through the wrong end of an opera-glass. You can here fancy everything, to the breath of the steeps, to have come freshly from Interlacken and twenty other such places in the recesses of the mountains, taken in the height of their summer beauty, and dropped like showers of roses over the margins of this stream. The variety is endless: all upon a small scale, but, by force of contrast, occasionally assuming a character of sublimity. Sometimes the river runs into little bays and creeks, and sometimes it closes up and forms inland

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lakes, sheltered on all sides by hills covered with verdure to the summit; in some places a château crowns a well-wooded height, or gleams out through the green depths of a valley; then a village grows up before you, its white façades creeping along the side of a cliff, or disappearing in a ravine as the steamer sails past. As you approach the port of Dinan (for so the French call the little quay that juts out here) you see the spires of several churches glistening above dense masses of foliage on the tops of the pretty miniature mountains, and now and then you get a

glimpse of the old grey walls of the fortifications, and the dark outline of a mighty tower standing on the heights with an air of tyrannic strength. A clatter of little boys and passengers from the town come down to carry back sundry purchases conveyed by the steam-boat,—an odd caricature or two of a sailor hanging, like a lizard, to the wall,—some half-dozen idlers, such as are to be found at every place in the known world where a boat touches,—and, perhaps, three or four English visitors sauntering

about, and glad of an incident to break the sleepy routine of the day,—are, upon the average, the first signs of life you may expect to encounter upon landing at the port of Dinan.

The town itself stands upon the top of the hill, to which you must make your way up a narrow, precipitous street, practicable only for goats, very properly called "*le plus vilaine rue de Dinan.*" This street is nearly perpendicular; it scales the face of the hill, and conducts you into the town through a picturesque old gate sunk in the centre of a stupendous tower. Your passage to this point will cost you some wind and some wonder, between the steepness of the ascent, the stalwart character of the architecture, and the jargon of the peasantry of this quarter, who, although Dinan does not belong to Lower Brittany, being included in that portion of the province which is called Middle Brittany, bear a close resemblance in manners and appearance to the Bas Bretons.

The choice of accommodation in Dinan lies between the Hôtel de Commerce, private lodgings, or an English boarding-house outside the gates on the crest of the hill. The hotel is small, smoky, and redolent of odours, which cannot be honestly recommended in the hot weather; there are two other hotels, the Poste and the Bretagne, but they are worse, and quite out of the question for people travelling for pleasure, who may be supposed to have been somewhat delicately nurtured. Private lodgings, like clandestine wedlock, are entirely a matter of chance, the comfort or discomfort of which will be found to depend entirely on the "circumstances of the case." Weighing these points maturely, I resolved to establish

myself at the boarding-house, and in the sequel had no reason to regret my determination.

The house was kept by an Englishwoman, Madame Barrs, and occupied an airy situation, commanding a fine open view of the country from the back windows. The arrangements of the establishment were for the most part in the English style, the apartments were well-furnished, and kept in excellent condition, and there was nothing wanted to satisfy one's British scruples except tea and tranquillity. These, it must be confessed, were serious defects; but it was not in the power of good Madame Barrs to remedy them. Tea proper never enters into the social scheme of French life; and, although it was always provided here with unfailing regularity morning and evening, it had a flavour of unknown herbs which led to much discussion and dissertation in favour of coffee. But there was no escape from the uproar of the establishment. It began at five o'clock in the morning, when the French servants usually commenced operations about the house, scrubbing, washing, moving the furniture, and screaming from the top of the stairs to the bottom, like an aviary of parroquets. In the midst of these discordant noises, a school-girl would burst into the drawing-room, and fall to thumping upon the piano with frightful energy and freshness of hand. Then a troop of children, just up out of bed, would hunt each other in and out of the rooms overhead, and out on the balconies, and down the stairs and up again, and so over the whole house, flying at last out of doors to finish the chase in the fields. Now you hope for a little repose, and are beginning to enjoy it too, when suddenly a low growling sound, something like the

rumbling of distant thunder, creeps up the walls, and slowly fills the room. You have not the slightest conception from whence or how this sound proceeds, and your surprise is increased rather than diminished when you are told that it is caused by the process of grinding coffee for breakfast. Madame Barrs would do well to get rid of these terrible noises, and to exclude children. Boarding-houses are not fit places for children. They are in everybody's way, and everybody is in their way. If they scamper about, as children with bright brains and healthy spirits ought to do, they are certain to provoke ill-natured complaints, and to bring their friends into contests and scrapes; and, if they are pent up in rooms to spare the nerves of their elders, it will be at the cost of tears and ill-humours, which their elders have no right to inflict. Then the companionships of boarding-houses are not always the most advisable for children. It reveals to them views of human nature which cannot improve their hearts or their understandings; gives them a premature taste for personal gossip and small talk; lifts them too soon out of their hoops, and tops, and dolls, to sit up at table and take an interest in scandal; and sets them the example of turning the seamy side of society out, a pleasant exercise of spite and malice, which their young, quick faculties are ready enough to seize and imitate. The company at Madame Barrs' was as unfit for children as children were unfit for them. But good, hospitable Madame Barrs, who thought of nothing all day long but going to market, and providing for the creature comforts and housing of her guests, never troubled herself with matters of this kind. If a remonstrance were made against the noises, she would

promise to do her best, which she would do, and which amounted to—nothing. She could not herself comprehend how the noises or the children could be objectionable, for her benevolence was so universal that she would have reconciled, if she could, the most obstinate antipathies; and, in strict justice to her it must be said that, however impossible or contradictory might be the petitions of her guests, she always returned the most satisfactory answers to them. And this satisfaction, which the real good-nature of Madame Barrs inspired, made people waive all further objections, and put up with petty vexations for the sake of Madame Barrs herself. Fortunately there was little to put up with, for the house was liberally supplied, and the charges were remarkably moderate, two recommendations which, combined with air and cleanliness, ought to content even the most splenetic Englishman.

XVIII.

BERTRAND DU GUESCLIN.

Of all the towns in Brittany, Dinan gives you the most complete realisation of the medieval character. The forms, colour, physiognomy of the middle ages are here to be seen in perfect preservation. Everything in and about Dinan is of that half-way antiquity, especially the architecture; the streets and little squares are nearly all shut up in Gothic houses of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There is nothing apparently changed since the days of the Thirty, except the costume of the people, and you might readily imagine yourself living in the feudal times if it were not for a round hat, which you occasionally see moving up and down the passages and dark arcades. Ah, that round hat! type of the unpicturesque dreariness of the modern world; how astonishingly it dispels all such illusions!

It is impossible to walk through Dinan without tumbling at every step over fragments of history: the towers, walls, promenades, are all historical. Du Guesclin is the hero of Dinan, and is presented to you at every corner; there is a statue of him in the Grand Place, a picture of him in the Mairie, and his heart is preserved in the church of St. Sauveur. If you are very curious about him, you can

get a peep at some of his relics, and there is scarcely a shop in the town where they do not retail his life and adventures in a hundred old story-books, ballads, and chronicles. Let nobody grudge him the distinction; he is better entitled to it than ninety-nine in a hundred of your French celebrities. He won it by absolute fighting, by a great capacity for giving and receiving hard knocks; and I know of nothing upon which posterity places so high a value. Moreover, he defended the town against the English, fought a duel with Thomas of Canterbury for kidnapping his brother, and afterwards gave a banquet to his vanquished enemies—incidents which are remembered here with a freshness of feeling that obliterates an interval of some hundreds of years. It was in Dinan, too, he fell in love, and was married; and the house is still an object of interest where the beautiful Stéphanie, looking out of a window at his famous duel, predicted his success, and was rewarded with his devotion. Such a man could not be suffered to escape glorification in France, where every town has its worthy in arts, arms, or letters, something out of the way of the mere mercantile spirit, and showing a tendency towards higher aims, however wide the disproportion between the object and its commemoration. In England we set ourselves against this sort of thing, and endeavour to keep clear of the *genius loci*. The people are too much occupied with the haggard necessities of the Present to have leisure or inclination to cultivate the useless Past; and if you want any information about the distinguished men who have been born in our country towns, you must find it out for yourself, as well as you can, in books. Even then it is ten to one if you find what

you want, for our local histories are the most meagre of all printed authorities.

If the picture at the Mairie be a likeness, Du Guesclin was a very ugly compact man, with a powerfully built figure, and an expression of face, rugged, bold, and full of condensed energy, which matched it to a miracle. We can understand with what force he wielded an axe, and how his blow came down like the fall of a sledge-hammer. It is for these qualities he is worshipped. He was a great fighter, a man of stern physical courage, tough in limb, and as daring as a hungry lion. Curious it is, that such merits should excite so much admiration; while gentleness, incalculably stronger than strength, so often passes away into sheer oblivion. Even the most useful manual exertions, with a seed of permanent civilisation in them, have no chance in the race for glory with these slaughtering powers. The man who makes a road, or sinks a well, or drains a town, has rendered a hundred-fold more important and lasting benefits to his country than the man who has destroyed towns, sunk ships, and slain tens of thousands of human beings; but the fighting man runs away with all the honours. Most of these heroes of the middle ages whom we find everywhere sculptured on tombs, or reared upon pedestals, were fighting men, and nothing more; herculean, hirsute fellows, ready for all occasions, with a contempt for life which, freeing them from all moral anxieties, enabled them to make the most of their muscles. The best thing about them, or connected with them, are the ballads and chronicles which they supplied with materials. We have reason to be obliged to them for having lived such romances as

Froissart has written. It was an achievement to be remembered, and to be grateful for; but, at the same time, it is quite as well to know how to value it properly, and to be able to distinguish the true from the false heroism which has had so many statues erected to it, and has had its head turned into such numberless busts and pictures.

Du Guesclin was one of the best specimens of that animal energy which has lifted so many constables and crusaders into the niches of history. His fight with Thomas of Canterbury is as exciting (which is saying quite enough for it) as the encounter of St. George and the unknown giant,—

> "Towards Christendom he made his flight,
> But met a giant by the way,
> With whom in combat he did fight,
> Most valiantly a summer's day."

And mixed up with this relishing valour, was a touch of tenderness in the character of Du Guesclin which makes an effective appeal to the imagination, from being found in association with such brawny vigour. Fidelity in a lover was no great merit in an age when it was enforced by vows, and regarded as a point of honour as well as faith. Virtue was not half so fearfully tried in those days as it is at the present moment; the soldier never incurred such risks in his round of sieges and campaigns as the flattered *roué* in the perilous run of a London season. But it is not for the truth of his devotion to the fair Stéphanie that Du Guesclin's memory is held in such favour, but for the romantic way in which he published it

to posterity. Stéphanie was his first wife (Du Guesclin's love for her not interfering with a second marriage), and his attachment for her outlived the attractions of her successor. It has been said that there is no second growth of the affections, a dogma which may be successfully disputed by the bulk of mankind; although, in the case of the renowned Bertrand du Guesclin, it seems to have held good in the end, for, in his last moments, he recurred to the dead love of his youth as if the intervening years of his life, during which her place was filled by another, had had no existence. On his death-bed he made a testamentary disposition of his heart, desiring that it should be carried to Dinan, and buried in the church of the Jacobins close to the tomb of his beloved Stéphanie. His wish was religiously executed; and, when the church of the Jacobins was demolished in 1809, the heroic heart was found in an excellent state of preservation, and after being embalmed and enclosed in a case of lead, was placed upon a mural tablet in the church of St. Sauveur, with the following inscription:—"*Ci gist le Cueur de Messire Bertrand Du-gueaqui en son vivant conestable de France qui trespassa le XIII. jour de juillet l'an mil IIIcc. IIIIxx. dont son corps repose avec ceux des Rois à Sainct Denys en France.*"

The statue of our great man, which stands in the Place du Guesclin (looking up sturdily at the dormitory windows), was defaced a few years ago, a part of it having been broken off in the night-time, to the infinite consternation of the inhabitants. When the profanation was discovered the next day, you might have supposed that a fire had broken out, or that the town was in a state

of siege, so full of alarm was the hurrying to and fro, the crowding, and talking, and agitation of masses of people through the streets. A regular French scene was immediately got up with all due pomp and preparation. The mayor and the municipal authorities, having first gravely deliberated upon the matter with closed doors, advanced in solemn procession to the Place, where they examined the statue, and took a *procès verbal* of the injuries it had sustained, for the purpose of prosecuting the requisite legal measures against the unknown delinquents. The grand display, however, went off in smoke, for the perpetrators were never discovered. At that moment there happened to be a very uneasy feeling towards our countrymen on the part of the French, and timid people on both sides of the water daily anticipated nothing less than a war; nobody, therefore, was much surprised at a report which attributed the outrage to the English. The calumny was resented with interest by a counter-report, which asserted that the French had committed the indignity themselves, for the sole purpose of charging it upon the English. Leaving that matter to be sifted in the confessional, where, doubtless, the truth was detected long ago, we may conclude with a safe conscience that, whatever their motive or want of motive may have been, the sacrilegious hands that chipped the statue had Gallic blood in them. The probability is that it was a practical joke; for, notwithstanding their love of statues and their exuberant nationality, the French are quite capable of comprehending and ridiculing their own vulnerable points, as they have sufficiently testified in the humours they have frequently played off upon this very statue. On one

occasion they embellished it with a pair of flaming moustachios and fiery-red whiskers, finishing the jest by clapping a cocked-hat upon its head. Indescribable was the astonishment and dismay of the good people of Dinan the next morning on finding their grand constable tricked out in such a drunken disguise.

XIX.

THE RUINS OF LA GARAYE AND THE PRIORY OF LEHON.

ANTIQUITIES are treated negligently enough in all parts of France, but worse in Dinan than in most other places. The old châteaux are all going fast to decay: even the modern one of La Garaye is already little better than a heap of stones overgrown with ivy and parasites. The *salle de bal,* where some of the most beautiful women in France enjoyed the riotous hospitalities of this celebrated scene, and the theatre where Racine was illustrated with the richest taste and splendour, can no longer be distinguished from the stable or the kitchen. The whole place is choked with weeds, and the tottering walls are hastened in their fall by the farming boors of the neighbourhood, who, whenever they want stones for any purpose, pluck out the nearest at hand,—perhaps a corner of a mullioned window or a fragment of a column. The consequence is, that, as these stones are generally taken from the lower part of the building, the upper becomes more and more insecure, and every high wind that sweeps over it brings down a crush of masonry.

Hardly anything remains of the once exquisite château of La Garaye except a naked and imperfect outline. A few beautiful windows may yet be seen, and a fragment of a

spiral staircase ascending to a tower; but the windows are dreadfully shattered, and the lower part of the staircase is gone. If you have any curiosity to explore the place, you must be content to walk about amongst the *débris*, through which stalwart trees have sprung up, making the household desolation all the more wretched by their gay verdure. To get up to the top of the walls is a feat not only of difficulty, but danger. Towards the centre a broken screen separates the largest apartment of the whole from some smaller one, and the remains of a capacious fire-place may yet be seen suspended in mid-air and jutting out over the wall. The depths below are inscrutable. Embedded in rank weeds and mosses, and infested by a numerous population of owls and reptiles, the experiment of a descent is not to be entertained. Nor are there any means of descent, nor anything to see even if these dismal caverns could be entered with safety. Now, all these obstacles could be cleared away at a trifling expense, and the place could be rendered accessible in every part without displacing a single stone, or removing a fibre of that picturesque vegetation which gives it such an air of antiquity. But circumstances have rendered the people indifferent to the conservation of their great houses. The first Revolution threw the most of these properties into new hands. They were sold to meet the exigencies of the provisional government, and the persons who obtained possession of them in this way, being always apprehensive of the return of the Bourbons,—an event which would have the immediate effect of restoring all confiscated estates to their original owners,—felt no anxiety to bestow any cost upon their preservation. On the

contrary, it was rather their interest to let them go to decay; for the châteaux were everywhere landmarks of personal rights, and in many cases the claims of families depended entirely on the château and a small patrimony immediately surrounding it; so that the possessors by purchase were not unwilling to let the houses crumble away as quickly as possible, giving a sly impetus to the work of ruin every now and then for the sake of diminishing the future value of the property, and destroying as far as they could the evidence upon which the rights of the owners in some instances depended.

La Garaye in this manner fell into the hands of some hard, horn-handed farmer. In one fell swoop he turned all the elegancies of the establishment into the rudest utilities, and trampled out all memorials of the legend of the château. The outbuildings, formerly the stables of the magnificent *roué* who built the place, standing under the shadow of the trees, close to the bridge where the lady of La Garaye received that dreadful fall which is said to have converted her rake-helly husband into a founder of hospitals, are now transformed into a range of barns. What metamorphoses in detail they may have undergone in the process it is now impossible to tell; but their present aspect presents a strange contradiction to the desolate ruins of the mouldering château which gleam upon you so mournfully through the trees. There are yet standing beside the bridge two handsome columns, formerly belonging to the gate, which the visitor may be recommended to examine from the interior. They are in excellent preservation, and covered with ivy to the top. The prints of the château which are to be found in

the books of modern tourists are not to be trusted. The artists usually put in an imaginary foreground for the sake of making a picture, and all these engravings are chargeable with at least one story too much.

The legend of La Garaye is equally suspicious. If you consult the authorities, written and unwritten, which are available on this subject, you will get into a maze of irreconcilable absurdities. The simple truth, as well as it can be extricated from a network of contradictions and improbabilities, seems to have been that the château was built by a young man of enormous fortune, who was cursed with an unbounded love of pleasure, which we may take for granted was not much checked by the possession of ample means for its gratification. He married a beautiful woman, who, nothing loth, plunged recklessly with him into his wild orgies and violent excesses. They kept the château full of company; had large parties down from Paris; used to act private plays, and dance and revel till long past midnight. When the surrounding country was buried in repose, then the towers of La Garaye, blazing with lights, and rocked with music, would flame out over the still valleys, and shouts of merriment and wasting tapers would outlast the stars, until the rising sun, extinguishing the glare, would send the mad *débauchés* to their chambers. According to one version of the story, the lady of La Garaye was killed at her gate by a fall from her horse as she was going out to hunt on a Sunday; the spot where the accident happened has undergone very little alteration, except that the balustrades of the bridge have rotted into the dyke, which, instead of being enlivened by a clear stream of running water, is dried

up and choked with weeds and brambles. According to other versions, the lady was not killed, but sustained a violent injury, which, annihilating the prospect of issue, had such an effect upon her husband, that it suddenly gave a new direction to the current of his life. It was the fashion of the age, when a man was struck with remorse, or had a serious impression made upon him, to rush at once into sackcloth and ashes. The more extreme the transition, the easier the reconciliation with Heaven and the Church,—a doctrine which the clergy were not slow to urge upon the conscience-stricken penitent. La Garaye acted up to it in full. He abandoned pleasures of all sorts, cast away his fine garments, and clothed himself in the coarsest clothes; turned his château into an hospital, and his theatre into a dispensary, and, after studying surgery and medicine in Paris for two years, he dedicated the rest of his life to the pious office of attending upon the ailments of the poor. The time was full of superstition—and what time is not to the ignorant and weak?—and this remarkable conversion of La Garaye was ascribed in the neighbourhood to supernatural interference. The life of the convert was published some years ago in two volumes; but it has long been out of print.

The priory of Lehon is another picturesque ruin in this quarter, in a still worse state of preservation, if that be possible, than La Garaye. This priory is said to have been built by one of the kings of Brittany about a thousand years ago, a strong fortress having been afterwards erected for its defence. Scarcely a vestige remains of either, except the cloisters, which are tolerably perfect, although the wretched people who live in them are daily

doing all they can to destroy not merely their beauty but their actual existence. The wretched crone who keeps watch in the place emerges as you approach, like an apparition, from a dark oozy chamber, not unlike a cavern in the bowels of a mine. When you enter the cloisters, dilapidated as they are, you cannot fail to be moved by the simplicity of the architecture, and by that tone of tranquillity so consonant with such scenes, but now so horribly broken up by a clatter of noises. Two or three swarthy, sweltering youths, who might have sat to Salvator Rosa for some of his brigands, are occupied in the quadrangle sawing and smashing wood. These brawny savages have no more sense of the spiritual charm of the place than if they were buried in a coal-pit, and in their violent operations think as little of chipping off pieces of granite from the columns or walls, should they happen to be in their way, as if they were breaking stones on the high-road. On the opposite side of the cloisters from that on which we entered we heard a constant succession of cringing, wheezing sounds, which suggested some disagreeable associations, and considerably interfered with our enjoyment of the otherwise intense solitude of this monastic retreat. Peeping through the dingy window, to ascertain the cause of the sounds, we discovered a horde of cotton-spinners at work, the whole place, wherever there was a sheltered nook in or about the priory, being appropriated to some servile labour or handicraft; just as if there were not ample room on the banks of the river, or under the hills, or up in the village, for a hundred times the quantity of work which a hundred times the number of hands employed in this den could accomplish.

A further examination of the ruins satisfied us that the final extinction of this splendid fragment of antiquity must have been deliberately resolved upon by the Vandals of this miserable village. In pursuance of this design, they have built a brewery straight up against the front wall of the abbey, close to the entrance, whose charming details are lost under its grim shadow. This brewery falls back upon the cloisters; and, should the increasing demand for sour beer (which Heaven forbid! on all accounts) require increased space, there is no doubt that the cloisters will be pulled down, without hesitation, to make way for more vats and cylinders.

At last we got into the body of the abbey; but, what a scene was there!—all ruin from the base to the top. The roof was gone altogether; the walls in some places were shockingly dilapidated and disfigured; the turret-stairs, which had been standing only a few years before, and by which you might have reached the top of the walls, at that time capable of being trodden by any adventurous visitor with a clear head, had disappeared; a few windows yet exhibited scraps of rich designs, and here and there we were able to detect upon the walls some traces of the ruddy tints which formerly shed such a flood of warm colour over the interior. But the depredations committed upon the building had been so considerable, that our enthusiasm was put to a severe trial. Only a few years ago, sunk in deep recesses in the wall, were two gorgeous tombs of some unknown knight and lady; now one of them was gone. That which remained was quite perfect, and had evidently been erected to the memory of some person of distinction. The floor of the abbey was covered

with wrecks and fragments, smothered up in long grass; and in one corner, to thrust the sacrilege more prominently into the faces of visitors, a shed had been erected for the purpose of cleaning flax!

We went next into the private chapel, where two or three prostrate tombs had been stowed away for safety. One of these is supposed to be the effigy of Jehan de Beaumanoir, the son of the hero of the Combat of the Thirty—a stout fellow, with a short beard and a churlish face. The chapel was in such a filthy condition, that we picked our way through it with feelings of aversion. The roof had either fallen in or been dismantled; the walls were perfectly plain; and the only object to compensate for the annoyances we suffered at every step was a beautiful window, looking out on a vegetable garden that runs down to the banks of the river, interspersed with willows and fruit-trees. But the Goths who hold the place, as if they were malignantly resolved to deprive the world of the pleasure of inspecting this window, had built a huge boiler for manufacturing or domestic purposes close under it, which effectually prevented the possibility of examination from within, and issued an edict forbidding visitors to enter the garden, which prohibited examination from without. This prohibition, however, did not prevent us from crossing the picturesque little bridge, which enabled us to see the window to great advantage from the opposite bank of the river. The ruin makes a charming picture from the heights above the town; but the village of Lehon itself is execrable. The houses are crumbling into the gutter; the streets are narrow almost to darkness, and ankle-deep in mud, and the population look as if they had been just

emptied out of a subterranean den, and pitched up suddenly into the daylight. Above the village, on the summit of a hill, stand the ruins of the old fortress, supposed to have belonged to the Beaumanoirs. The tradition is doubtful; but it is certain that the stronghold was intended as an outwork to defend the town and priory, that it was once inhabited by Anne of Bretagne, and taken, after an obstinate defence, by Henry II. of England. There is now nothing to be seen but the shells of two towers, filled up to the brim with waving corn. The table-land, which bears these skeleton reliques of the old château, is covered over with crops.

XX.

THE VALLEY OF THE FOUNTAIN.—THE BALLS OF DINAN.

In speaking of social Dinan, I must be understood to refer to a period before the last Revolution, or revolutions, for there seem to have been several revolutions shut up in each other like rings in a Chinese puzzle. Whether Dinan has been very social since is doubtful. That it was very social then, in spite of its little social bickerings and jealousies, so indispensable to the comfort of the English abroad, I can gratefully answer for.

At that time there were two hundred and fifty English residents in and about the town, and the average annual mortality amongst them was three. This fact was assumed as a conclusive proof of the salubrity of the place. There is no doubt that Dinan is healthy; but the low rate of mortality amongst birds of passage can hardly be accepted as a satisfactory evidence of it. It is worthy of special remembrance that the English do not die abroad if they can help it. They always come home to die, if they have notice enough.

The climate is light and genial, and the situation picturesque; a happy combination which always makes it a pleasure to live, and enables us to fill life with all the

pleasures within reach. And so we found it at Dinan, where we lived in an incessant round of seasonable delights. Amongst the greatest charms of the place the Fountain is entitled to special distinction.

This Fountain is a mineral spring which rises in an umbrageous dell close to the town, and is reached by a pathway, thickly planted and shaded, down the side of the mountain. It is about half a mile from the gates, a pleasant evening walk for the inhabitants. Dinan is surrounded by bowery promenades, but this is the most agreeable of all. When you get down into the valley it closely resembles Schlangenbad, wanting only that profound stillness which is not to be found elsewhere. Having zigzagged your way into the depths of the valley, you cross a little rustic bridge and suddenly find yourself in a handsome promenade marked out by long rows of trees, and so smothered up in leaves that the sun at its meridian height cannot penetrate the cool retreat. The rippling of a tiny stream reminds you of the bridge you have crossed, and looking a few yards onwards you discern a mill through the woods, a solitary mill! with its wheel plashing in the water, and giving an artificial impulse to its course. One is often struck in remote country places by the loneliness of the dwellers in them, especially millers and cultivators of the earth, who sometimes live at such a distance from the community on whose consumption they depend, that it is difficult to understand how they contrive to carry on their affairs at a profit. Now this miller of the Fountain, who, by the way, made no sign of his craft except his wheel's turning, had evidently selected this sequestered spot for his business, on account of the running

stream, which, although its volume is scanty, rewarded his confidence by the fidelity of its services; this rivulet being honourably distinguished by never running entirely dry, so completely is it sheltered and shut in from all droughty influences. Yet with all his water advantages, one still wonders how the miller manages to carry on his intercourse with his customers, for although he is only half a mile from Dinan, his way to it is beset with difficulties. How does he get his corn, for instance, through the entangled passes of these mountain defiles! And when he has converted it into flour, how does he convey it away? Up the hills on donkeys, for they are the only living things that could carry burdens up these close steeps? or down the valleys, and so round about the country, on the backs of goats, to whose curious feet alone the broken fragments of rocks and the narrow slippery paths present no impediments? But let the miller get rid of his flour how he may, and it is to be hoped he has a merry life of it, nobody can deny that he has pitched his tent in a most charming spot. His white gate and adjoining wall seem to be shouldering the rivulet in sport out of its channel.

A building on the opposite side of the promenade, half way between the mill and the bridge, suggests a different train of reflections. The Dinanaise are a gay people. They are fond of dancing above all things, and no matter what awkwardnesses fall out in the way of international politics, they are particularly fond of English girls for partners. They used to have their regular assembly balls throughout the summer; on Tuesdays at the Mairie, and on Fridays at the Fountain. The latter were called the Fountain balls, and much to the surprise of strangers,

they take place about three o'clock in the afternoon. The building before us is the ball-room.

The picturesque effect of these Fountain-balls is something quite out of the common route of one's travelling experiences. That little building with a thousand names and souvenirs scratched on its walls is the ladies' robing or unrobing room, where, casting away their cloaks, scarves, and bonnets, they prepare their simple demi-toilets for the dance. That light sheltered place in the middle of the walk, looking very much like an aviary, is the place for refreshments and for drinking the mineral waters of a morning. If the reader will have the goodness to collect all these particulars before him, and bury them in a chaos of foliage, he may form an accurate notion of the Fountain.

Formerly the balls took place in the morning; but that arrangement interfered so injuriously with the interests of the tradespeople in the town that it was abandoned. The three o'clock arrangement had an equally disturbing effect upon the English. The choice was to dine before three o'clock, or to postpone dinner indefinitely till the end of the entertainment, which, including the walk home, rarely terminated before nine o'clock, and sometimes even later. Dinner is an important affair with everybody; it is the gravest of all affairs to an Englishman; but to an Englishman on the continent it is the whole business of life. It fills up his entire day. He opens the morning with an excursion to the market, where he surveys and prices the supplies; the remainder of the morning is dedicated to the busy idleness of household preparation. Then comes the dinner itself, which absorbs

not so much specific time, as the sense and end of all time; and then the evening with its drowsy dreams, and luxurious memories of the feast, to which the noblest passing realities are utterly incomparable. When, therefore, the three o'clock edict was issued by the authorities, various were the rumours and mysterious hints which agitated the heretofore happy valley. But the Dinanaise and the dance would wait for no man's dinner, and so, with much reluctance, and after a fruitless resistance, the point was given up. The Fountain balls thenceforth began in the daylight and ended with it.

The ball was organised by subscription. There were stewards and a master of the ceremonies, and nothing more than an introduction was necessary to secure admission. It may help to show how cheaply the pleasures of life are obtained in France, when we observe that the subscription to these balls, including both the Fountain and the Mairie, was only eight francs for the whole season! Yet it was found to be quite practicable at this small cost, which must greatly perplex and disgust my respectable countrymen, to realise a great deal of innocent and satisfactory enjoyment.

The effect, as I have mentioned, is singularly picturesque. The flitting of the dresses in and out through the trees, and the occasional lapsing into still groups in the intervals of the dance, bring out a *tableau vivant* after the manner of Watteau. When the ball is over, the partners break off gradually, some wending away with their watchful guardians, who think that they have already stayed out late enough, and others straggling off with evident symptoms of fatigue. The return lies up the winding

path through the trees on the side of the hill, and here the careful managers of the entertainment have garnished the track with hanging lamps, just close enough together to guide the steps of the clamberer, keeping him all the way in a pleasant state of twilight uncertainty, and sufficiently far apart to prevent the possibility of any vulgar reminiscences of such places as Vauxhall. When this path, coiling along the shadowy hill-side, becomes crowded with happy girls, in the exuberance of youth and open-air enjoyment, their ringing laughter or low-voiced joy suggesting a hundred little dramas of the heart and the animal spirits as they ascend to separate for their homes, the scene becomes animated into a living romance.

But we must not quit the weird recesses of the Fountain without following the stream till it conducts us to the beach of the river, where we find ourselves upon the port at which we disembarked from the St. Malo steamer. This comes upon us as a surprise, for it is the last spot we should expect to find ourselves on in emerging from the hills. The walk through the valley is like a dream, full of lingering shadows and sweet lulling sounds. It runs all along, in and out, up and down by the stream and through the woods, occasionally as wild and rocky as a Swiss gorge, and sometimes softening away into bits of pastoral fields, and green slopes, and quiet open nooks streaked over with broken light. A painter with an easel in his hand might loiter here with delight through many a long summer day. The sunsets in this valley are exquisite.

The ball at the Mairie is as characteristic of our social Dinan as the *al fresco* at the Fountain. It is held in a

tolerably large and handsome room, which on these occasions is well lighted up and profusely decorated with flowers. The managers of the ball are always very polite to strangers, and generally issue invitations to visitors of whom they happen to have any knowledge. Young ladies are chaperoned as at other public assemblies, and the utmost formality prevails throughout the evening. When a gentleman is introduced to his partner, he attempts much the same sort of small talk (in rather a more serious tone) as prevails elsewhere; but the want of common topics, the total ignorance of the *finesse* of fashionable life, of which this small talk, scientifically considered, is an essential element, and the innate modesty inseparable from the primitive modes of these Dinanaise people, have the effect of reducing their scraps of conversation to the simplest and quietest forms. It is in the dance the soul of the gentleman comes out in all its French gallantry; but the moment the dance is over, he retreats into his original stillness, hands the lady to a seat, bows, and retires. I am here chiefly speaking of the nature of the intercourse which used to take place at these assemblies between the English ladies and the gentlemen of Dinan: it was something too remarkable to escape observation. The prevalence of this custom had the strange effect of leaving the ladies *ensemble* at the end of each dance, so that we missed altogether that coquetting promenade, enlivened with sundry eye intrigues for the next polka, which forms so prominent a feature in the enjoyments of an English ball-room. The gentlemen of Dinan are, undoubtedly, a very inoffensive race; and, whatever may be thought of them in other respects, there is no denying

to them the merit of unexceptionable decorum, and a respectful reserve towards our English ladies, which entitles them to the best acknowledgment of all anxious fathers and mothers who settle down in Dinan for a few years of economy.

These reunions, cheap and simple as they are, shed a permanent charm over the town. What would Dinan be without its balls? There is a tradition in Dinan, well remembered by many of its present residents, that once upon a time several young men came here from Cambridge and Oxford for the purpose of study during the vacation; but, being tempted out of their scholastic resolution by the fascination of the balls, they invited the whole town to a grand route at the Mairie, by way of testifying their sense of the hospitality with which they had been treated. Of course, the entertainment was a splendid affair. The English reputation for munificence was at stake, and the ball was accordingly got up on a scale of commensurate liberality. The Dinan gentlemen, determined not to be outstripped on their own ground in a matter so congenial to their taste, gave a ball in return to the students. This *was* a *fête*, such as Dinan had never witnessed before. People say that the air of the room was similar to the sort of atmosphere you might expect to find if you were nestling among the petals of a moss rose; that flowers, and festoons, and draperies, and lamps were dispersed in the most cunning ways through forests of laurels; in short, that there was no end to the beauty and variety of the scene. It is one of the great memories of Dinan that the French carried the day (or night rather) in this social rivalry; not because their *fête* was more

expensive than that of the English, for, in fact, it cost a great deal less, but because they knew better how to set about it, and threw more imagination into their arrangements. The distinction is worth nothing, expressing as it does a distinction between the two national characters which reaches to higher points.

XXI.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH IN DINAN BEFORE THE REVOLUTION.

Although Dinan presents many temptations to the English settler in the way of scenery and economy, it is not a very agreeable residence in other respects. It is one of the dullest spots in the world for people of pleasure, and quite as dreary for people whose enjoyment lies in art or literature. It has no theatre, no *cafés*, no billiards—none of the usual escapes for idlers which you find in most continental towns; and its little circulating library, surprisingly well-stocked for such a place, is, nevertheless, a miserable resource for any one already tolerably accomplished in books. In fact, if you want a book out of the ordinary routine, you must issue a special order for it, and wait at least ten days or a fortnight before you can get it, for the librarian must send to his correspondent in Paris, who must find out the publisher, and, as the traffic which the said correspondent carries on with Dinan is too languid to inspire him with much activity, you may be quite sure he will not put himself to much trouble for the sake of expediting the commission.

The only alternative left is society: you find this out

very soon in Dinan. Society is really the essential thing here; and here, as in all small communities, society (pleasant enough in its shut-up coteries) is convulsed by scandal. The English are not satisfied to be preyed upon by the cupidity which their own foolish ostentation creates about them, but they must turn round and prey upon each other. While you are yet fresh in these porcupine circles, you will be stunned by mysterious hints and innuendoes, and kindly warnings against all the people you meet, one after another, so that, if you credit only the half of what you hear, you will be compelled to arrive at some very uncomfortable conclusions. But you get used to this in time, and begin at last to understand that the good-natured friend who admonishes you is as bad as his neighbour.

The state of society amongst a handful of English in an inland French town, is not more striking than that of their relations with the native inhabitants. Their national peculiarities, independently of other considerations, are not calculated to render them very popular. All the class prejudices of home are transplanted in complete flower into these little settlements—you have the family pride, the social distinctions, the *hauteur*, the cold mannerism, the struggling pomp, and unbending stiffness in full efflorescence. Five hundred a-year in such places as Dinan, performs the aristocratic *rôle* of high blood and thousands at home. All this is felt keenly by the French. Our insensibility perplexes them; our habitual disrelish for free intercourse wounds their vanity; they cannot comprehend our incapacity for adaptation; they wonder at our formality and frigidity; they frequently pity us—

occasionally despise us—and sometimes hate us. There are other points in our associations with them which touch them still more vexatiously. We bring up the price of provisions, and accuse them of cheating us. Let us consider this for a moment.

It is an universal complaint amongst the English in these cheap places, that living is exorbitantly dear, and that they are overcharged by the French. Everybody has heard the cry, even in merely travelling through the country, that the French have two prices—one for themselves and another for us. It is asserted as a positive fact, that at the same *table-d'hôte* where the Englishman is charged three francs, the Frenchman sitting next to him is charged only two, or one and a half, before his eyes. Such assertions are common enough; and all that can be reasonably expected of tourists is, that they should speak honestly out of their own experience. For my part, I have traversed a considerable part of France, by diligence, by post-carriage, and private-carriage, have lingered in some places, and passed rapidly through others, during many visits to the country, and I never saw an instance of that glaring nature. That the English are overcharged, is perfectly true; but it must be set down, along with many other antagonisms, to their own purse-proud bravado, and real economising meanness. *Mi lor Anglais* is expressly the "man made of money." He wears the badge of gold upon his sleeve for rogues to peck at. He invites the imposition he denounces. He would not be content unless he was made to pay higher than other people, and he glories in the excuse it affords him for letting out his wrath upon the French. The

contradiction is not in the two prices of the French—a trade chicanery which is to be found all the world over, in various masks and disguises—but in the pitiful absurdity of the English, who expect to get everything at the lowest charge, while they are shaking their purses in the face of the vendor, and insisting upon having homage rendered to their superabundant wealth.

The absurdity is bad enough in tourists who go abroad for a few months, and have really plenty of money to spend; but economisers, who settle down with their families, have no excuse for not making the best of their position. It would be impossible to discover what these people want. They are not satisfied with obtaining provisions on an average at about half the price they would pay for them in England, but must needs cry out that they are cheated. Indeed, they confidently assure you that the place is quite as dear as England, and that the notion of coming into France for economy is a delusion, while they are all the time buying chickens for two francs the pair, and a quarter of lamb for twenty-five sous. They not only insist upon their right to grumble, but insist upon it with the greater vehemence in proportion to the unreasonableness of the occasion.

Is it very surprising, under such circumstances, that the French should regard our Cheapside countrymen with a little distrust and no good will? In addition to other reasons, there is the certainty that as sure as the swallows bring summer, the English bring high prices. The moment they appear the markets go up. The sun has not a more decisive effect upon the thermometer. An inhabitant of Dinan could formerly live comfortably (in the French

sense and quite equal to French desires) on 1200 francs per annum, and keep his servant; but, after the English had swarmed into the town, he was obliged to dispense with his servant, and relinquish numberless little indulgences. Formerly he led a gay, careless, easy life; after the English came, he led what is called a hard life. Formerly he had enough, and leisure to enjoy it; after the English came, he was ground down into all sorts of shifts and expedients, and obliged to work double tides to keep himself secure. Surely it is not very wonderful that he should be a little out of humour with the interlopers who have brought all this upon him, especially when he hears them perpetually abusing him for taking advantage of them.

Nor must it be concealed that the French are no longer so amicable and tolerant of the angular peculiarities of strangers as they used to be. Much of their cheerfulness, and, with it, much of their graciousness, has departed. They have had their vicissitudes, and the effect is visible in the gloom which has fallen upon them. The sunshine seems to have passed away, and left them in shadow. All that remains of their national vivacity and fickleness is the love of change: they are changed in every thing except that. But enough of their eternal motion remains to keep open a wide gulf between them and the English in the social relations of small towns. If the Frenchman is neither so gay nor so brilliant as he was twenty years ago, there is still sufficient mercury in his veins to enable him to disturb the sluggish temperament of the English. He cannot make his appearance in an English house, without throwing the whole *ménage* into confusion. He talks too fast — never stays still for three minutes

together—is for going here and going there, as if there was nothing else in the world to be done or thought of —and shatters an entire family with such an explosion of restlessness, that they are glad to shut themselves up when he is gone, in the hope of endeavouring to recover their nerves. The effect of French intercourse, waged in this way against the stolid resistance of English fixed habits, should be seen in detail to be thoroughly understood. The English have a distinct view to permanency and the future in everything they do: they are for economy and settling their children, and they consider regularity of conduct as the machinery by which alone useful results can be accomplished; substantial dinners and solemn tea are amongst their articles of faith; and rugs, carpets, curtains, closed doors and shutters, sea-coal fire and pokers, are indispensable to their theory of life. The French, on the contrary, exhaust the fugitive pleasures of the hour, and don't care a rush for posterity; they spend what they have, and leave the law to take care of their children, and would as soon think of saving money to build churches, as of submitting their genius to a regularity of any kind; they cannot keep their doors, windows, or mouths shut; they cannot treat a dinner with ceremonious gravity, or sit after it, and they abhor tea; fixtures, cupboards, comforts, are representative agonies to them; they fly instinctively from all monotonous forms, fling themselves into a perpetual whirl, and after an incredibly short sleep, they start up all alive again, and ready to shake the tranquillity of the world for another unbroken round of about nineteen hours out of the four-and-twenty.

XXII.

THE MAYOR'S HEAD.—THE SEDAN CHAIR.—MIXED ANTIQUITIES.

It is a pity that French taste shows itself so vilely in all matters connected with local hero-worship. Dinan, in the midst of its grand scenery and stupendous architecture, is deformed by an intrusive apparition of a tall pillar, with a head on the top of it, in honour of M. Pinot, a mayor, to whose munificence the town is indebted for the charming promenade which clasps its walls, and who was, therefore, really entitled to a graceful and appropriate tribute from the inhabitants.

The reader should be informed that the town, which stands on the crown of a hill, is enclosed in massive walls, flanked by towers of prodigious size and strength. From these walls the descent into the neighbouring plains and woods was formerly precipitous. The surrounding country is studded with points from whence military positions used to be taken up, and as these points are distant and elevated, it is evident that the valley which intervened must have been of considerable extent. M. Pinot, who was a wise man in his generation, and who was clearly of opinion that the delights of peace are preferable to the devastations of

war, and who suspected, moreover, that we had reached a period in the world's history when Dinan would cease to want fosses and scarps, bethought himself how he might turn this open hollow to a pleasanter purpose than that of a siege, and accordingly raised an artificial terrace of handsome dimensions round the town, planted it liberally with trees, and thus converted into a grateful shadowy promenade, the idle valley which had hitherto shut up the merry voices of the people within a grim enclosure of battlemented walls.

Now this was a thing worthy of being remembered. It bequeathed a more agreeable memory and a more available good to succeeding ages, than all the heroism of the Beaumanoirs, all the duels of the Du Guesclins, and all the combats of all the Thirtys added together. It was really a thing to be commemorated in Dinan in the noblest, and purest, and least affected manner. But there is only one way in France of commemorating all great people indiscriminately—generals, poets, founders of hospitals, musicians, kings, and kings' mistresses; and so there was nothing to be done in honour of M. Pinot, but to put up a statue to him. The site selected was a conspicuous spot on his own terrace, where stood formerly a lofty tower, whose *debris* forms a sort of table-land for the pedestal of a tall column, on the top of which is perched an unsightly piece of sculpture, intended to represent the head of the worthy mayor. The day of the inauguration of this pillar might have been mistaken for one of the high festivals of the Church. The town was summoned at break of dawn by drum and trumpet; the people assembled by thousands, and the authorities, as usual, were in their places, making

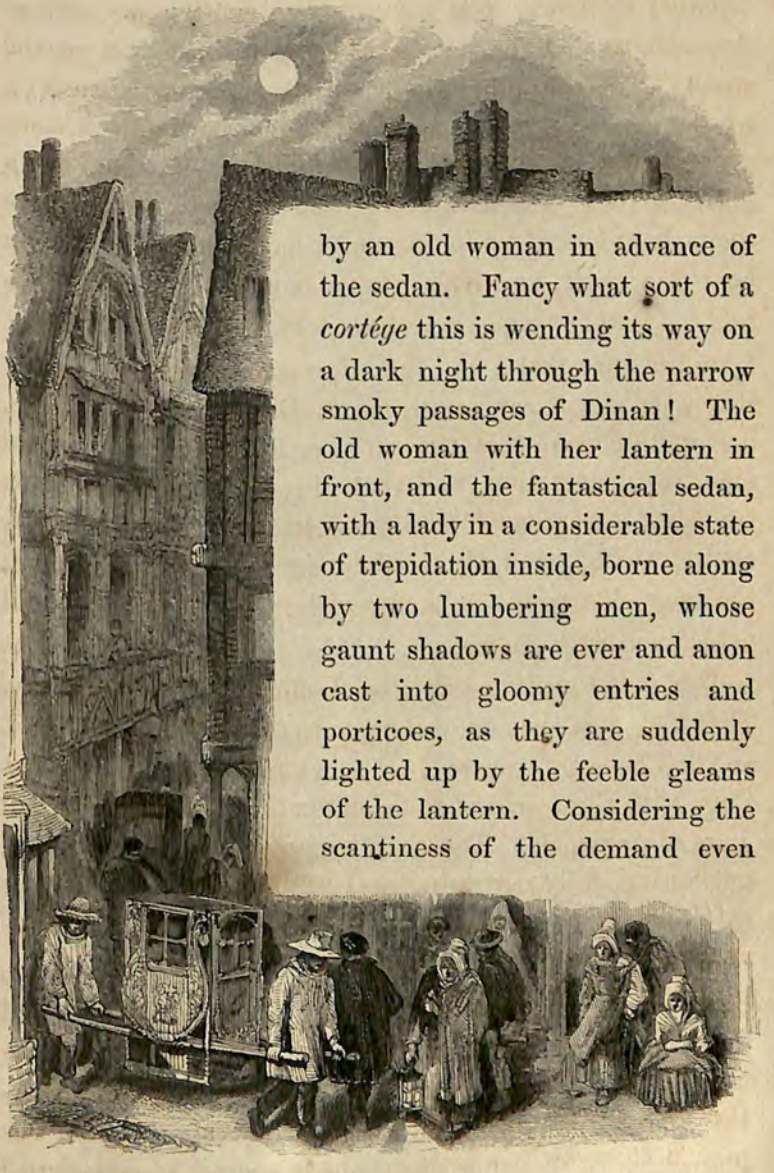
an infinite show of mock heroic dignity and pantomimic fustian. Previously to the commencement of the proceedings, the top of the pillar had been covered with a napkin, and nobody was supposed to know what was concealed beneath; for Surprise, which is regarded by good critics as rather a low and mean source of interest, is held in all public exhibitions in Catholic countries to be the grand element in the production of effect. Conceive, then, the thrill of the multitude when this napkin was unexpectedly snatched away! The ceremonies had gone forward according to a regular programme previously arranged and duly announced; the band had played at stated intervals, and the lapses in the music had been filled up with the dumb-show movements of official men, who looked unutterable things; and then, all of a sudden, at a preconcerted signal, a cannon was fired, the napkin was whisked off into the air, as if by magic, and the features of M. Pinot were suddenly disclosed to the astonished crowd below, who rent the heavens with their shouts, just as naturally as if they had not had the faintest suspicion of what was coming.

There is no town upon which meretricious finery of any kind sits more awkwardly than Dinan. The streets, houses, habits, dresses, are strikingly antique in appearance. Modern frippery would be as much out of place in Dinan, as a knot of gaudy ribbons upon the head of a marble horse. Even its deficiencies and inconveniences are in strict keeping with the tone of life suitable to its quaint arcades, and one would be sorry to purchase more comfort for oneself at the risk of interfering, however slightly, with the primitive style of the place. For in-

stance, there are no carriages for hire in Dinan. That is a luxury to come. But you would rather dispense with so desirable an accommodation, than spoil the aspect of the streets by driving a handsome *voiture* through them. Yet, where are carriages so obviously required as in a town which you must clamber up a hill to reach, and down a hill to leave? I believe there is such a thing as a *voiture* somewhere locked up in Dinan. I have heard of it, as you hear of a ghost, to which people have testified who have told it to other people, who have told it again to you; but I am not sure that I had the information from any person that ever saw a carriage hired in Dinan. At all events, it is quite certain that the carriage is not the established mode of locomotion, and that the duties of fashionable transport are usually performed by donkeys and sedan-chairs, which, strangely maundering and jerking through the town, harmonise a thousand times better with its old gables and dark passages.

The sedan-chairs are pictorial curiosities in their way. They look as if they had belonged to the age of Louis XIV., and had been transmitted, not very carefully, to the present time, with the traces of the royal painting and gilding still upon their panels. The chair is fantastically shaped, and not untastefully decorated and embellished; but, except as a matter of necessity, an English lady would hardly venture into so crazy a contrivance. She has no choice, however, and accordingly, into this box she is compelled to crush her silks and velvets when she is going out for the evening, or has to pay a visit on a wet morning. As there are no lamps in Dinan, it is necessary to be accompanied at night by a lantern, which is supplied and carried

ROYAL BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY



by an old woman in advance of the sedan. Fancy what sort of a *cortége* this is wending its way on a dark night through the narrow smoky passages of Dinan! The old woman with her lantern in front, and the fantastical sedan, with a lady in a considerable state of trepidation inside, borne along by two lumbering men, whose gaunt shadows are ever and anon cast into gloomy entries and porticoes, as they are suddenly lighted up by the feeble gleams of the lantern. Considering the scantiness of the demand even

for this accommodation, inconvenient as it is, and the number of persons required to keep up the supply of such an establishment—no less than three being indispensable for each journey—it might reasonably be supposed that the service of the sedan would be, comparatively, rather expensive; yet you may be thus conveyed in pomp across the town to your destination, wherever it may be, and your chair will call for you and convey you home again at night in the same ceremonious procession, for the moderate charge of three francs!

The streets of Dinan, picturesque as they are, must not be looked upon with confidence as perfect reliques of the middle ages. In fact there is a great deal of patch-work here, although the darkness of the materials and the rudeness of the workmanship impresses you at a little distance with a conviction of the antiquity of the place. The mass of buildings, the great walls, the large towers, the narrow porticoes and arcades, sustained by clusters of columns, and the dim houses, bracketed and embellished all over, present to the eye, at first sight, a mass of seemingly pure antique outlines, which a closer examination enables you, without difficulty, to assign to different periods. Thus, in front of many of the houses are porticoes supported by numerous pillars, bearing highly ornamented capitals, evidently the work of the middle ages, and intended for buildings of considerable magnitude, while the poverty of the houses themselves must be referred to more recent times. In some places, too, columns are to be seen side by side, which, upon inspection, are found to belong to different ages. Thus the church of St. Sauveur, the façade of which, covered with

bas-reliefs, produces an imposing effect at a distance, loses much of its interest as you approach. The door and the south wall of the nave are all that can be traced to the original structure. The remainder of the building, which, from the mingled richness and vigour of the sculpture seems very ancient, is undoubtedly of more modern date. Mérimée, who was employed by the French Government some years ago upon a tour of monumental inspection, ascribes the rest of the church to the 15th century, and says that it is "d'un style mesquin et sans grace."

The apparent boldness or rudeness of the sculpture, by which you are so agreeably deceived at a distance, may be attributed to the natural material out of which the additions and repairs have been made. It is a sort of granite, which, from the softness and coarseness of its grain, is wholly unfit for works that require minute and careful embellishment. This crumbling stone is composed of a very hard sand, which instead of cutting in the usual way, runs into dust at the touch of the scissors. This very peculiarity, however, renders it susceptible of singularly large and picturesque effects, from the breadth of hand it demands of the artist, and the care requisite in handling details over so treacherous a surface.

XXIII.

HABITS AND SUPERSTITIONS OF THE BRETONS.

The traveller who keeps to the beaten track, can scarcely hope to learn any thing about Brittany. He must diverge from the main routes, if he would see the people in their primitive and national habits. The high roads are now pretty well macadamised; the principal towns are tolerably well supplied with hotels; the *cuisine* is certainly not equal to Verrey's, but you can dine satisfactorily nevertheless; and you can get newspapers and books, and other *agrémens* much as you get them elsewhere. The tourist, therefore, may post easily enough from Brest to Rennes, or sail up the Rance from St. Malo to Dinan, and make a detour to Nantes on his way to Paris, traversing no inconsiderable portion of Brittany: but he will not be a whit the wiser concerning the Bretons. The leisurely Englishman who risks the springs of his carriage on any of these lines, dropping at an hotel, looking about him, and then going home again, will have nothing to report about the country beyond that monotonous buck-wheat which, even in its most cultivated sections, distinguishes it from the rest of France. If he would really see the Brittany of a former age in its yet undisturbed integrity, a people sombre and heavy, with boorish manners and

antique costumes, steeped in their old superstitions, speaking their old language, and living in the midst of Celtic monuments and the reliques of feudal and religious pomp, he must penetrate districts remote from the high-ways, traverse roads impracticable for locomotives, cross marshes, plains, and mountains, and bury himself in scenes that have not yet been swept into the circle of Parisian centralisation. Here, and here only, he will find the traditions of the country still subsisting in the faith and usages of the people.

Let us glance at this cluster of tumble-down houses, half stone, half wood and mud, jammed up among hillocks of clay, orchard trees, and the *debris* of Roman walls and Gothic towers. A street runs, or meanders, through the midst; unpaved, irregular and surfy; invaded here and there by a scrap of a courtyard shouldering the causeway; and indented at intervals with clumps of stunted firs, and broken flags, set cornerwise to bind the fluctuating path, through which, in the summer time, tall, melancholy grass mopes upward into the humid air. This is the public way, or high road; but, with the exception of the narrow strip in the centre, with the sky overhead, it is wholly absorbed by the people on each side. All the houses have work-shop sheds or crazy porches projecting far into the street; and here, in the open air, the greater part of the life of the inhabitants is spent. Here the poor beat the corn of their little fields; here they wash, prepare their simple cookery, and spread out their linen to dry. A busy, chattering, squalling place it is. As you pass through you see children seated at the open thresholds eating black bread, and lucky are they, if you can detect a streak of

honey on their fingers or lips. In front of the doors are knots of women spinning, and accompanying their monotonous labour with songs or gossip in high treble voices. The old men are all stretched out at full length basking in the sun; and, as evening approaches, the workshop benches are given up to the young girls who crowd round them in eager, picturesque groups, while one of the travelling mendicants, the *trouveurs* of the country, recites a favourite ballad, or trolls out some plaintive airs. The work of the day is over; the bustle and mirthful clamour increases; and as the twilight begins to set in, the young people gather into the *Place,* and, full of riotous animal spirits, are speedily lost in the whirls of their mountain *ronde:* the gayest and noisiest of all national dances. The strange "auld-warld" style of the dresses, the dark background of mixed and crumbling architecture, and the freedom and simplicity by which the whole scene is so strongly marked, might almost tempt the spectator to imagine that he was standing in a city of the middle ages. Nor would the speculation be very wide of the reality; for this is an old Breton town, where the habits and manners, costume and peculiarities of the middle ages, are to this hour carefully preserved.

The first thing that strikes the traveller, after his eye has become a little accustomed to the physiognomy of the country, is the vast number of ruins that are scattered over the surface. There is no part of the world, where, within the same compass, such extensive and magnificent reliques of Druidism are to be found. The stones of Carnac, stretching in eleven parallel lines for a distance of upwards of seven miles, have long excited the wonder and

admiration of Europe; and there is not a single form of Druidical remains, of which there are not innumerable specimens in various states of preservation. Barrows, galgals, *tombeaux* and *sacrés*, to use the French phrases, Dolmens, Menhirs, Roches-aux-Fées, Cromlechs, Lichavens, appear to have been showered upon the soil with a profusion for which history assigns neither origin nor use. But while the curiosity of the stranger is intent upon the examination of these stupendous and inexplicable structures, he is still more amazed by the discovery that these Celtic temples, or altars, or graves, or whatever else they may have been, are generally either mixed up with fragments of the feudal ages, or close in the neighbourhood of early Christian monuments. This strange association throws open a large and perplexing field of inquiry. Christianity seems to have pursued her triumphs, with bold and rapid steps, into the very recesses and last strongholds of that gigantic idolatry which once exercised so marvellous an influence over the human mind; and in some instances to have wrestled with its sorceries on the very spot where they were enacted. Many of the Druidical localities are connected by exulting tradition with the victories of the Cross; and in not a few cases they are blended. Thus there is an old legend, still repeated and currently received amongst the peasantry, that the stones of Carnac owe their origin to a heathen army which chased St. Cornelius into the valley, because he had renounced paganism; when, being close pressed and surrounded on all sides, he had recourse to prayer, whereupon the whole host were petrified in their lines as they stood. And near the city of Lannion, there is an enormous Menhir, between

twenty and thirty feet in height, crowned with a stone cross, and exhibiting upon the front the passion of Christ carved amongst the usual gross images of the Celtic worship. This intermixture of symbols is carried out still farther in some of the popular superstitions, to which we shall presently refer, in which the sites of the Druidical faith are selected as the special theatres for the performance of Christian miracles.

Of all the provinces of France, Brittany is the richest in the evidences of religious sentiment. The fields, the causeways, the streets, the mountains, are starred with churches, chapels, crosses, images, expiatory monuments, and consecrated chaplets. A notion was entertained on the return of the Bourbons, of restoring the road-side crosses which had been demolished during the revolution;

but it was found that the reconstruction of the crosses at the cross-roads in Finisterre alone would cost no less than 1,500,000 francs, and the intention was of course abandoned. The nation could not afford to indulge in so expensive a luxury; but the piety of the Bretons, for-

tunately, did not stand in need of such suggestive helps. It had successfully resisted too many shocks, and survived too much persecution, to require the admonitions of tinsel Virgins, and Saints twice crucified in the agonies of village art.

The sanguinary agents of the revolution had tough work to do in this sturdy province. The struggle in Brittany between the guillotine and the unlettered faith of the people was long and obstinate. The Bretons clung to their religion with unexampled fidelity, until they wearied the guillotine with victims. There was no employment of physical force, no resistance: the population were calm and resolute. Every man's mind was made up to martyrdom, and, with a few insignificant exceptions, the inhabitants of Basse-Bretagne were inaccessible to the terrors or seductions of power. Throughout the whole of that memorable season of carnage they remained, as one of their graphic historians describes them, on their knees with clasped hands: an attitude which they kept to the end, till the clotted knife fell from the hands of their executioners. The priests and the people were true to each other to the last extremity. In vain the republican committees pronounced the penalty of death against the minister who should celebrate any of the functions of the Church. In vain they destroyed the edifices of public worship: "I will pull down your belfries," exclaimed the famous Jean-Bon-Saint-André to the Maire of a village, "in order that you may have no more objects to recal to you the superstitions of past times." "You must leave us the stars, and we can see them farther off," was the memorable reply of the enlightened peasant.

A single instance, recorded by Souvestre, will sufficiently illustrate the intrepid devotion of priest and people. At Crozon all the churches were demolished; the priests, tracked day and night, could not find a solitary spot to offer up the mass in security; the villages were filled with soldiers. In this extremity, how did they contrive to perform the offices of religion, to baptise the new-born, to marry the affianced? Listen!

"Midnight sounds: a flickering light rises at a distance on the sea: the tinkle of a bell is heard half lost in the murmur of the waves. Instantly from every creek, rock, and sinuosity of the beach, long black shadows are seen gliding across the waters. These are the boats of the fishermen freighted with men, women, children, and the aged of both sexes, who direct their course towards the open sea, all steering to the same point. The bell now grows louder, the light becomes more distinct, and at last the object that has drawn this multitude together appears in the midst of the ocean! It is a bark, on the deck of which stands a priest ready to celebrate mass. Assured of having God only for a witness, he has convoked the neighbouring parishes to this solemnity, and the faithful people have responded to his call. They are all upon their knees, between the sea rolling heavily beneath, and the heavens above darkened with clouds!"

Can any one imagine a more striking spectacle! Night, the billows, two thousand heads bent lowly round the man standing over the abyss, the chants of the holy office, and, between each response, the awful menaces of the sea murmuring like the voice of God!

It is a natural sequence that a strong attachment, amounting almost to infatuation, should exist between pastors and their flocks who have suffered so much in common; and this attachment, as might be expected, is

not unfrequently heightened into fanaticism on the part of the people. The Breton priests occupy the most conspicuous place in the foreground of the picture. They wield an unlimited ascendancy over the confiding and sensitive population. Taken direct from the plough, clothed in coarsest cassocks, with heavy brogues to protect his feet, and a stout stick in his hand, the devoted minister traverses the muddy roads and the most difficult mountain paths, at all seasons of the year, with unflagging zeal, to carry the viaticum to the dying, or offer up prayers for the dead. He is followed everywhere with love and awe. His aid is sought at all times of calamity, and his counsel brings strength and comfort. His sermons possess almost divine authority, and exercise a supernatural power upon his audience. The crowd palpitate under his appeals, like the sea under a storm. They cry aloud, weep, shriek, and fling themselves upon the earth, in that delirium of religious enthusiasm which supervenes upon the undue excitement of the passions to the exclusion of the reason. In all states of society, such exhibitions are deplorable; but in the Breton they are at least natural and sincere, and contribute, in the absence of healthier influences, to regulate and control the simple morality of his life. Sometimes they react upon the priest himself, and convert the apostle of the frenzy into its victim. On one occasion a poor zealot, who had probably become insane through the excitement of his arduous ministry, and who used to sleep at the foot of a stone cross by the roadside through summer and winter, informed the assembled crowd that Christ had appeared to him, and asked him for his left hand. "It is yours,

Lord," he answered. "I have kept my promise," he cried to the affrighted congregation, raising his left arm over his head—a stump bandaged with bloody linen: then, in a fit of horrible inspiration, he tore the linen from the reeking wound, and, making a semicircle in the air, flung the streaming blood for ten feet round him on the heads of the people.

Notwithstanding such revolting incidents, however, the relations between the pastor and his flock are productive of important advantages in the existing condition of the population. The Breton peasant has few ideas beyond those revealed to him by religion. He is a man living within the echoes of civilisation, yet far enough off not to be able to distinguish its voice. Villemarqué tells us that when he was making his collection of ballads, travelling through all parts of the country, visiting the popular festivals, *pardons, veillées, fileries,* and fairs, mixing familiarly with the people, he found to his great astonishment, that they were all well acquainted with their national ballads, but that not one of them could read. In this vast want of mental resources, they are thrown upon their superstitions. Living apart from the rest of the world, and buried in their grim solitudes, they have no reunion except the church. It is their spectacle. The processions and religious ceremonies, the fêtes, and saints' days, and anniversaries, fill up the void of their desires; and to these ends, as the pleasures and graces of their lives, the whole poetical capacity of their nature is directed. Hence, all their customs are tinged, more or less, with religious feeling. Until very recently they had no physicians amongst them; and priests, prayers, and

offerings were resorted to in lieu of medicine. At the first indication of disease, at the solemn hour of death, and even long after the grave has received its tenant, the offices of religion are invoked for help and consolation. The dying are soothed with candles and devotions, the dead celebrated in annual fêtes. The morrow of All Saints sees the bereaved family gathering in the common apartment, and, in accordance with a curious and pathetic superstition, they leave some meat upon a table as they retire from the room, under the certain belief that the dead will return to the scene of their household affections to partake of the anniversary repast.

Like all other countries, Brittany has undergone many changes, and received the vaccination of knowledge. But there are large districts, upon the confines of which civilisation, in our active and accumulated sense of the term, is still arrested by the feudal immobility of the population. These districts are principally comprehended in the departments of Finisterre, Morbihan, and the Côtes-du-Nord; and it is here we must look for those surviving characteristics of the middle ages which confer such peculiar interest upon the people. There are certain minor points of contrast amongst the departments themselves; but in the essential attributes of nationality there is a common agreement. They all have their Druidical remains, and old castles, and traditions connected with them; they all have ballads and balladmongers, lays and superstitions; and wherever you move amongst them, you are sure to fall in with an historical recollection already familiar in some shape to most of the literatures of Europe.

It is in this enchanted ground you hear from the lips of the peasantry a thousand legends about the Round Table; until at last you get so accustomed to the famous names, hitherto revealed to you only in the antiquated diction of the unpronounceable old poetry, that you would not be very much surprised if some of the stalwart champions were to come prancing by you in full armour on the highway. It was in the château of Kerduel that King Arthur held a magnificent court, surrounded by the flower of his chivalry, Lancelot, Tristan, Ywain, and the rest; with his fair Queen Gwenarc'han and the beautiful Brangwain. The old château is gone, but a modern one stands in its place, and the name and all the memories associated with it are still reverently preserved. By the way, the Breton antiquaries are very angry with us for changing the name of Gwenarc'han, which means as white as silver, to Guenever, in which its etymology is lost; and for altering Brangwain into Brangier. The reproach is probably just enough; but in their zeal to appropriate Arthur and his court all to themselves, they insist upon burying his majesty in the isle of Agalon or Avalon, near this château, instead of allowing him to repose in the island of that name in Somersetshire, where our minstrels interred him long ago. We will give up the etymology of the incontinent queen, if they will only leave us the bones of the king. This Breton island, we may add, was the favourite resort of Morgain, celebrated in the chronicles as a fairy and sister of Merlin the enchanter, but who was in reality a renowned priestess of the Druids.

It is here also, in this storied Brittany, that we tread upon the sites of many fearful tragedies and strange deeds

narrated by Froissart and Monstrelet, and others: Beaumanoir, where Fontenelle de Ligueur used to disembowel young girls to warm his feet in their blood;—Carrec, where they show the mysterious pits in which a Duke of Bretagne hid the golden cradle of his son;—Guillac, where the Combat of the Thirty took place, that extraordinary fight towards the close of which Geoffrey de Blois replied to Robert de Beaumanoir, when, exhausted by wounds and faint with thirst, he asked for a respite to obtain a drink, "Boy de ton sang, ta soif se passera;"—the old Château of Kertaouarn, with its portcullis yet gaping, and its dripping dungeons still exhibiting the enormous beam loaded with rings to which the seigneur used to chain his prisoners, where the whistling of the winds in the subterranean passages is believed to be the moaning of the souls of unshrived coiners who return to their work at sunset;—the Château de la Roche, where the lord of Rhé found the Constable du Guesclin carving a boar into portions for his neighbours;—the Square in Dinan, where the same constable fought Thomas of Canterbury for entrapping his brother during a temporary truce;—and the Church of St. Sauveur, where his proud heart is preserved, after having run more hazards, dead and alive, than any other heart upon record.

Amongst such recollections as these, the Breton peasant draws his first breath. His earliest experiences are linked with the reliques of the feudal ages. His boyhood is passed amongst ruins, dignified with awful names and shadowy histories. His life is elevated and saddened by them. He steps in the daylight mournfully amongst them, and he shudders and cowers as he passes them at night.

He has no books, no social intercourse except amongst people like himself, and then only upon occasions which admit of no play of the social feelings. This is exactly the man to be affected by the vague terrors of solitude; to see weird faces in the woods; to track the demons of the storm in the clouds on the mountain tops; to hear the shrieks of wandering spirits; to believe implicitly in omens and presages, and supernatural visitations. The church snatches him up in his dreamy fears, and completes his subjugation. His whole existence is one long superstition.

Let us look at the actual life of these people for a moment, before we approach the imaginative aspect of their character.

The peasantry of Basse-Bretagne are generally short in stature, with ungainly bodies, thick black hair, bushy beards, large lumpish shoulders, and a fixed expression of seriousness in their eyes. There is as marked a difference in the special characteristics of particular districts, as there is in their costume; although the general description of frankness and fidelity, coldness and indolence, credulity and ignorance, will apply with equal correctness to them all. The obstinacy of the Bretons has passed into a proverb in France. They make capital soldiers or sailors, but, left to themselves, fall into phantasies and idleness. Love of country, showing itself in the most passionate excess, is a permanent attribute of the national character. Bretons have never been known to seek the favour of the court. They have always abhorred the contagion of offices and public employment: and this feeling exists so strongly even amongst the lowest classes, that a Breton peasant, after a service of twelve or fifteen years in the army or

navy, always returns to the scenes of his boyhood, and lapses back again at once into his original habits—as if the interval had passed in a trance!

The inhabitants of Cornouaille, embracing the districts lying between Morlaix and Corhaix, in the department of Finisterre, are distinguished by some striking peculiarities. Their costume is composed of the liveliest colours, bordered with brilliant loops. They frequently embroider the fronts of their coats with the date when they were made, or the name of the tailor, wrought in various coloured wools. In the mountains, the breeches are worn short and tight, and equally fit for the dance or the combat; but towards Quimper they expand into huge cumbrous trousers, which fall about their legs and embarrass all their movements. An old author says, that the nobility imposed this inconvenient dress upon them, that they might not stride too fast in the march of revolution! Their hats, not very large, and surrounded by a raised border, are ornamented with ribbons of a thousand gay colours, producing a very picturesque effect as they flutter in the wind. The mountaineers wear a girdle of leather, fastened by a copper buckle, over their working-dresses of quilted linen. The costume of the women is composed of a similar variety of vivid colours, at once sprightly and graceful, and not unlike the dresses of the peasantry in the neighbourhood of Berne. The life of these people is in keeping with their gaudy apparel, and forms a remarkable contrast to the sombre aspect of the population elsewhere.

The people of Léon, in the same department, are of grave and solemn manners: even their festivities are under the control of this natural severity, and their dance itself is

stiff, severe, and monotonous. Their cold and rigorous exterior, however, conceals a volcano. Their life, like that indeed of the Bretons generally, is folded up within themselves, and is expressed with singular propriety in their dismal costume. A Léon peasant sails along in a floating black dress, large and loose, and confined at the waist by a red or blue girdle, which only makes its melancholy the more palpable; the border of his great hat rolling back over his sun-burnt features, and his profuse hair falling thickly down his shoulders. The women are not less lugubrious in their appearance, and might easily be mistaken for the *religieuses* who attend the hospitals. Their dress, plain black and white, is equally ample and modest. It is only when they go into mourning that they affect anything like gaiety. On such occasions they dress in sky-blue from head to foot. They wear mourning for the living, not for the dead. In Léon, you move through a succession of funerals: in Cornouaille through bridal feasts.

Morbihan and the Côtes-du-Nord recal still more emphatically the aspect and temperament of the middle ages. The peasantry in the neighbourhood of Vannes are of the unmistakeable lineage of the old feudal races. Turbulent and choleric, they are always either fighting or drinking, frequently both. On the least excitement, they will grind their teeth and shake with violent emotions. All their evil passions are called into fierce activity by their hatred of the bourgeois. The Breton peasant has an invincible horror of modern notions, of the airs of fine breeding, the etiquette, taste, and manners of the towns. He glories in his rough candour, his vigorous arm, and his blouse. Even the richest farmer rarely aspires to the grandeur of cloth,

and considers himself well off if he can wear shoes four months in the year; while the poor never ascend above coarse linen and sabots, and are often compelled to dispense with the latter. Their jealousy of the bourgeois is a natural corollary from their circumstances; but they have other and profounder reasons for disliking them—the instinctive sense of the superiority of town education, and their knowledge of the contempt with which townspeople regard the old usages and traditions of the country. A Breton never forgives a slight offered to the objects of his habitual reverence. It is a part of the superstitions of our universal nature to defend with the greatest pertinacity those canons which we have ourselves taken for granted, and for which we can assign no better grounds than the prejudices of custom. This smouldering feud between the large cities and the rural population, marks very distinctly the boundary between the Breton masses, and the rest of the people. Nothing can be more dissimilar than the modes of thinking of individuals disengaged from the primitive habits of the soil, and congregated together in the stirring occupations of commerce; and the native population still haunting the pastures of their ancestors, and inheriting their manners.

The intercourse with the towns is too slight to produce any sensible modifications of the popular characteristics. In the Côtes-du-Nord you meet country gentlemen speaking nothing but Breton, and attending the session of the States at Rennes in the dress of peasants; in sabots, with swords by their sides. The Bretons know nothing of governments or parties. They are never mixed up in the fugitive politics of the country. They live and die, and

there an end. Their lives are passed in a tranquil routine, without change or trouble; presenting no varieties of pleasure or employment beyond the little assemblages of their arrondissements, the jousts of holidays, and the gossip of the fireside. A match of bowls under the yew trees in summer, or penny picquet in winter, gives them more pause for thought than wars or regicides. They believe, with Pope, that "whatever is, is best;" and they hunt the doctrine to the extremity of fatalism. They yield a passive obedience to the principles of Good and Evil. Whatever happens, either way, they ascribe to God or the Devil. Upon questions of public policy they neither express any opinion nor feel any interest. It would be impossible to inflame them into a revolution about such matters. But assail their traditional rights, and the whole population is in the field. The only instance in which the Bretons were ever known to combine for a common purpose, was when an attempt was made, while the cholera was raging, to inter those who died of that disease in detached cemeteries, for the preservation of the public health. The peasantry repudiated the doctrine of infection. The dead cannot kill the living, was their exclamation: death comes only by the will of God. Piety towards the dead is a sentiment common to all primitive communities; but the Bretons carry it out to an excess of romantic tenderness. They believe that the dead are conscious of their locality, and that they lie in their graves like sentient creatures listening to high mass and the supplications of their friends! "The souls of our fathers dwell here," they cried: "far away in the cemetery they will no longer hear the chaunts of the service, nor the intercession of

relatives. This is their place: we can see their tombs from our windows: we can send our children to pray beside them in the twilight. This ground is the property of the dead: no power can take it from them, or change it for another." It was with great difficulty the priests could persuade them that the dead were insensible to their cares; an innovation upon their established creed which caused them no small astonishment, and sent them home troubled and perplexed with profound wonder.

The isolation of the Bretons is peculiarly favourable to the nurture of such fantastic ideas. Their way of life seems to keep them perpetually hovering between physical and spiritual existencies. They live in a sort of mental gloaming, in which real objects become converted by the imagination into mysterious phantoms, exaggerated and fearfully embellished by the terrors they inspire. Unlike the peasantry of other countries, the Bretons are dispersed over the soil in solitary farms, never forming themselves into villages or societies. The want of constant intercommunication, which elsewhere preserves the faculties from that rust which eats in upon them in loneliness—that self-consuming moodiness which the ancients described under the image of a man feeding upon his own heart—leaves them an incessant prey to their heated and unregulated fancy. As in certain styles of art, where the fertile invention of the painter is unrestrained either by the limits of nature or the laws of taste (such as the arabesque, for example), we see all manner of complex monsters, centaurs, griffins, and chimeras, dimly revealed through an indescribable confusion of tracery; so, in the phantasmagoria conjured up by the poor Breton, uninformed by knowledge

and uncontrolled by judgment, we discover all sorts of extravagant illusions mingled in a bewildering chaos of types and images.

The lonely farm-houses of the Bretons betray at once their extreme poverty, and that negligence of personal comforts which always marks the condition of a people given up to the oppressive doctrine of necessity, and the reveries of superstition. The farm-house, built on the naked earth, without cellarage, but sometimes with a scanty granary overhead, is the residence of the family and the cattle. The stable is generally at the end of the habitation, divided from the principal apartment by a partition wall, with a door communicating from the one to the other. In many instances this partition is only breast high: amongst the poorest class, men and beasts herd together. The furniture is as wretched as the dwelling—beds, formed out of a sort of narrow chest, in which the sleeper is nearly stifled; a table, opposite the only entrance, along the sides of which are ranged wooden or earthen bowls, delf plates, large spoons, and scoured basins; a wooden clock; a trough near the fire; a box for keeping eggs, milk, and butter; a recess, with an image of the Virgin in delf, dressed gaily on fête days; and at the sides, or hung between the beds, two or three images of Saint Anne, or Saint Genevieve of Brabant. Upon the table lies a knife, shaped like a scythe, and a black loaf, covered with a cloth, over which is placed a mat for the purpose of protecting the bread from the smoke, and from the clouds of flies which the close neighbourhood of the stables brings through the open door in the warm season. The fireside is the grand centre of attraction, with benches at each side

of the hearth, and the inside of the chimney garnished with an enormous pot-hook, trevets, gridiron, and pans. Around this fireside, by the light of a resin torch, fastened in a block of wood, the labourer and his children sit throughout the long winter evenings, relating legends, or talking under their breath about apparitions, or the voices of the dead that come wailing to them on the night-winds.

In front of these farm-houses there are, invariably, accumulating heaps which urgently remind the traveller of similar loathsome mounds he has observed at the doors of hovels in Ireland. Nor is this the only point of resemblance. When a stranger enters the humble dwelling, he exclaims, *Que Dieu bénisse ceux qui sont ici!* This is, word for word, the Irish greeting of, "God bless all here!"

Hospitality—the virtue, as it has been somewhat sneeringly designated, of savage life—prevails in its fullest development among the Bretons. The traveller may approach the wide-spread door with confidence, assured of a hearty welcome. The sight indeed of a stranger is always an event of interest to these insulated rustics, and he is instantly seated in the place of honour to dine with the family. The moment he enters they offer him a pitcher of cider, and if he refuses to drink they regard it as an insult, which they never forgive. Rank, or money, has no influence over this free and cordial reception. The poorest man is as bounteously treated as the richest; and, of all classes, none are so joyously hailed as the wandering mendicants. The moment one of these gossips appears in sight, the whole household crowd round him eagerly to hear his budget of news.

The mendicant is, in fact, a very important character in

Brittany. He is the carrier-general of all sorts of intelligence, the Gazette des Tribunaux of the department: conveys letters and love messages, helps in negotiating proposals, sings popular songs which he frequently composes himself, for he is the bard of Lower Brittany, and adds to the rest of his functions the still higher character of a nomade novelist. His voluminous gossip, when he gêts ensconced by the chimney-corner, refers to all the tittle-tattle of the country side; the miraculous cures, and ominous appearances; how stay-pins may be dropped into certain fountains, to ascertain whether their anxious owners will be married in the next year; how a bevy of young girls gathered, for a like purpose, on a certain bridge on St. Michael's day; what crowds of young men came to that beauty fair, full of hope and curiosity; and how many marriages ensued thereupon. To such prattle as this, the peasants listen with delight; but it is when the mendicant relates a complete story, in all the artful pomp of circumstantial details, that they crouch round him in the winter nights, palpitating with mixed terror and expectation, while the howling storm without, to which they assign so many significant meanings, imparts a savage wildness to the scene.

Souvestre gives us a specimen of these narratives, which it may not be uninteresting to transcribe. It loses, unavoidably, much of its original energy by being diluted from the wild imagerial Breton language into the French; and must suffer still more in our English version. But we have endeavoured to preserve as close a verbal resemblance as the genius of our phraseology would admit. The mendicant begins by crossing himself, and invoking a

solemn blessing, hoping that the young women will profit by his narrative, and then breaks at once into the history.

THE WINDING-SHEET.

There was formerly at Plouescat a young girl, called Rose-le-Fur, beautiful as the dawn of day, and full of spirit as a young girl should be who has just left her convent.

But bad counsels had ruined her. Rose had become as unstable as a straw, blown about at the pleasure of the wind, dreaming only of *pardons*, flattery, and fine dresses. She was no longer seen at church, nor at the confessional: at the hour of vespers she walked with her lovers, and, even at La Touissant, she neglected to pray over the grave of her mother.

God punishes the wicked, my children. Listen to the story of Rose-le-Fur, of Plouescat.

One evening, very late, she had been at a wake far from her own home, listening to the melancholy dirges round the fireside. She was alone, humming to herself a song which she had just learned from a young Roscovite. She reached the cemetery, and flew up the steps as gaily as a bird in May.

At that instant, THE CLOCK STRUCK TWELVE! But the young girl thought only of the handsome Roscovite, who had taught her the song. She made no sign of the cross; she murmured no prayer for those who slept beneath her feet; she traversed the holy place with the hardihood of an infidel.

She was already opposite the door of the church, when, throwing her eyes around her, she saw that over every tomb was spread a white sheet, held at the four corners by

four black stones. She stopped. At this moment she was beside the grave of her mother. But instead of feeling a holy fear, possessed by a demon Rose stooped, seized the winding-sheet which covered the grave, and carried it off with her to her own house.

She went to bed, and her eyes were soon closed; but a horrible dream convulsed her slumbers.

She thought she was lying in a cemetery. A tomb was open before her, from which a skeleton hand was thrust out, and a voice cried, *Give me back my winding-sheet! give me back my winding-sheet!* and at the same time she felt herself drawn towards the tomb by an invisible power.

She awoke with a shriek. Three times she slept, and three times she had the same dream.

When morning came, Rose-le-Fur, with terror in her heart and eyes, ran to the rector,* and related to him all that had happened.

She made her confession, and wept over her faults, for she felt then that she had sinned. The rector was a true apostle, good to the poor, and mild of speech. He said to her, "Daughter, you have profaned the tomb; this evening, at midnight, go to the cemetery, and restore the winding-sheet to the place from whence you took it."

Poor Rose began to weep. All her boldness was gone; but the rector said, "Be of good courage; I shall be in the church praying for you; you will hear my voice near you."

The young girl promised to do as the priest desired her. When night came, at the appointed hour, she repaired to the cemetery. Her limbs trembled beneath her, and every thing seemed to be in a whirl before her eyes. As she

* The Breton name for the *curé* of a parish.

entered, the moon was suddenly obscured, and the clock struck twelve!

For some moments all was silent. Then the rector said, with a loud voice, "Daughter, where are you? Take courage, I am praying for you!"

"I am beside the tomb of my mother," answered a feeble voice in the darkness; "father, abandon me not!"

All was again silent. "Take courage, I am praying for you!" repeated the priest, with a loud voice.

"Father, I see the tombs opening, and the dead rising!" This time the voice was so weak, that you might have believed it came from a great distance.

"Take courage!" repeated the good priest.

"Father! father!" murmured the voice, more and more faintly, "they are spreading their winding-sheets over the tombs. Father, abandon me not!"

"Daughter, I am praying for you. What do you see?"

"I see the tomb of my mother, who is rising. She comes! she comes! Father——"

The priest bent forward to listen; but he could only catch a remote and inexplicable murmur. On a sudden a cry was heard; a great noise like that of a hundred grave-stones falling together; then all was silent.

The rector threw himself on his knees, and prayed with his whole soul, for his heart was filled with terror.

The next day they sought in vain for Rose-le-Fur. Rose-le-Fur never appeared again.

MORAL.

Thus, young men and maidens, may this history serve you as a warning. Be pious towards God, and love your

parents; for punishment always overtakes light heads and bad hearts.

The general character of these recitations may be gathered from this example; but, to make the illusion perfect, we want the agitated group of frightened women and children, clinging to each other round the flickering fire, and the earnest pantomime and solemnly-inflected voice of the tattered man, whose attitudes and accents fill them with such speechless fear.

But the mendicant, prominent as the part is which he plays on these occasions, is eclipsed in importance and popularity by an individual indigenous to Brittany, whose multiplex labours and versatile capacity entitle him to a separate and distinguished niche in the portrait-gallery of her historical characters. This individual is no other than the tailor: but such a tailor as was never dreamt of in May-fair, or realised in Bond-street.

The Breton tailor is a complicated man in mind and person. Generally cross-made, lame, and humpbacked, red hair and a violent squint would complete the *beau ideal* of the class. The reason assigned for these peculiarities is, that the profession is embraced only by persons of weakly growth, although it is very difficult to conceive how such persons could perform the varied and toilsome offices monopolised by the craft. The tailor rarely marries, scarcely ever has a house of his own, and lives abroad like the birds or the wild goats. The men hold him in contempt on account of his effeminacy; but he finds an ample compensation in the ardour of the women. He seldom dines at the same table with the men; but when they are

gone, a dozen glittering fair hands lay out a cozy repast for him. The source of his influence lies in his wheedling tongue. He is an eternal chatterbox, a consummate master of the art of flattery, is *au fait* at the whole strategy of flirtation, and can coquet and coax with unfailing success for others, although never for himself. His individual exemption on this score gives him a sort of licence with the fair sex; for a pretty girl may listen with impunity to a man so completely out of the pale of wedlock. He retails all the small talk and scandal of the parish; knows all the new songs, occasionally contributing one of his own; and is as full of stories, and tells them as well as the mendicant: with this difference, that the latter confines himself to stories as melancholy as his own life, while those of the tailor, better suited to his peculiar functions, are all glee and sunshine. In a word, the tailor is the scandalous chronicle, and high minister of the love affairs of his district.

He is at the height of his inspiration when he is charged with a negotiation of marriage: an undertaking which is usually managed through his agency. If he meets a magpie on his way, he quickens his steps, for it is considered an ill omen. His first object is to see the young lady alone. He opens with some indifferent topic—the weather—the crops—the state of the sky; perhaps he hits upon the stars; then, naturally enough, compares them to her eyes; and so contrives to bring about the delicate question with the address of an accomplished diplomatist. When he succeeds in obtaining her consent, he applies to her parents, and a day is settled, on which he brings the lover to the house, accompanied by his nearest relative.

This is called asking leave. The young people retire to one end of the house, while the old ones are settling the preliminaries at the other, the tailor vibrating like a pendulum between them. At last the lovers are summoned to the table, where they eat with the same knife, drink out of the same glass, and indulge in white bread, wine, and brandy. A day is then appointed for the assembling of the two families at the house of the young lady; this is called *velladen*, or the view. At this preliminary meeting they are all dressed in their holiday suits. Great preparations are made in the house. The tables and benches are highly polished; the drawers left half open with premeditated carelessness, to display a large stock of household linen; pieces of bacon are hung up profusely in the chimney; the horses, if there be any, are paraded; all the plate that can be mustered up is ostentatiously exhibited; and every thing is done to give the bride an appearance of wealth, although, in most cases, the majority of these luxurious equipments are borrowed for the occasion. At last the young man arrives; he steps over the farm with an air of business; examines every thing with his own eye; and then enters upon the question of property. The parents drive as hard a bargain as they can. If the result of the negotiation, however, should happen not to fall in with his expectations—that is to say, if they do not come up to his price—all he has to do is to enter the house, draw a brand from the fire, and place it across the hearth. By this action he indicates his intention of relinquishing the alliance.

On the other hand, if the terms be agreed upon, the ceremonial is proceeded with at the end of a stipulated

period with extraordinary pomp and circumstance. Eight days before the wedding, the bride and bridegroom invite their friends to the feast. The mode of invitation is curious. The young couple, forming separate processions, with white wands, accompanied by their bridesmen and bridesmaids, proceed to the houses of the persons they intend to invite, and stopping opposite to the doors, pronounce a regular speech, in which they engage them to the merry-making, announcing at the same time the name of the innkeeper who is to furnish the dinner. This speech, which seems to be an affair of inflexible tradition, is frequently interrupted by prayers and signs of the cross. At last the wedding-day arrives; and now the little tailor, elevated to the summit of his multifarious functions, assumes the office of a *rimeur*. He approaches the house of the lady, followed by the friends of the bridegroom, and is met on the threshold by the *rimeur* of the opposite side. Here a long inflated dialogue takes place between the bards, which ends by the admission of the expectant lover into the house. After this they go to the Mairie, and then to the church. The bridal repast is often attended by five or six hundred persons. The bridegroom sings a tristful song, which is succeeded by a similar wail from the lady. These songs are called *complaintes*, and the burthen of them is the leave-taking of their single lives. These wild rhapsodies throw a shade of melancholy over the company, and even draw tears from their eyes: the effect is described as being singularly touching. But the sensation does not last long. The influence of the wine and cider begins to be felt, flushing the cheeks and unloosening the tongues of the party. Dinner is over,

the patriarch of the assembly rises, and the guests all stand uncovered and respond to his solemn grace. This is followed by a dance, riotous and furious as a whirlwind of leaves in a storm, or a frantic dance of Indians under the maddening spell of a recent victory. The bride and bridegroom are then conducted to their chamber; and, by an ancient and strange custom of the country, two watchers are appointed to sit up with them all night.

The majority of these regular contracts are matters of calculation, into which love never enters. And it is perhaps for this very reason that the Bretons are famous for improvident marriages. In a country where wedlock is thus openly ratified by prudential considerations, it is not to be wondered at that the poor, who cannot reach the desiderated test, should often be found plunging recklessly into the opposite extreme. Besides, there is no surveillance in the way of social opinion to warn them against the consequences; no *status* to be maintained; no Mrs. Grundy to propitiate or outvie. The Breton is luckily exempt from all the ordinary responsibilities of domestic indiscretion. He never stops to think about the danger of increasing the population. Political economy is as great an enigma to him as the balance of Europe. He never thinks of a provision for a family: to do him justice, he never thinks about a provision for himself. He often marries without a bed; sometimes without a house to put one in; and it is not at all an uncommon occurrence for him to borrow the nuptial couch from some compassionate friend. But what of that? He is safe in the eternal justice, the clemency, the protection of Heaven.

What is the use of human foresight, he argues, when he has the providence of God?

These marriages of the very poor are altogether unique. No country in the world furnishes a parallel to them. The most extraordinary feature is, that the peasant not only marries without a penny in his pocket, but the happy-miserable couple invite all the surrounding families to the marriage festival; and, what is more wonderful still, the greater the number of visitors, the better enabled is the host to provide them with a becoming banquet. The solution of the difficulty is obvious enough. Every guest is a contributor to the feast. Some bring wine, some linen, others honey, corn, and even money. Thus a liberal supply is scrambled together, and the utmost hilarity prevails. The company are always dressed in their gayest attire, attracted by the dance and the revel. There are frequently no less than three hundred people assembled at these joint-stock bridals; and it often happens that the contributions they furnish constitute the sum total of the worldly goods with which the new-married pair begin housekeeping!

Nor does the general sympathy end here. When a young woman of this class is about to become a mother, presents pour in upon her from all sides, especially from others similarly circumstanced. It is a sort of festival amongst the mothers-expectant of the neighbourhood. The birth itself is a solemn religious event, surrounded by many touching details. The infant is looked upon as an angel from heaven, and all the mothers present offer their breasts in succession, regarding the sanctifying contact of the new-born lips as a happy portent. If the mother

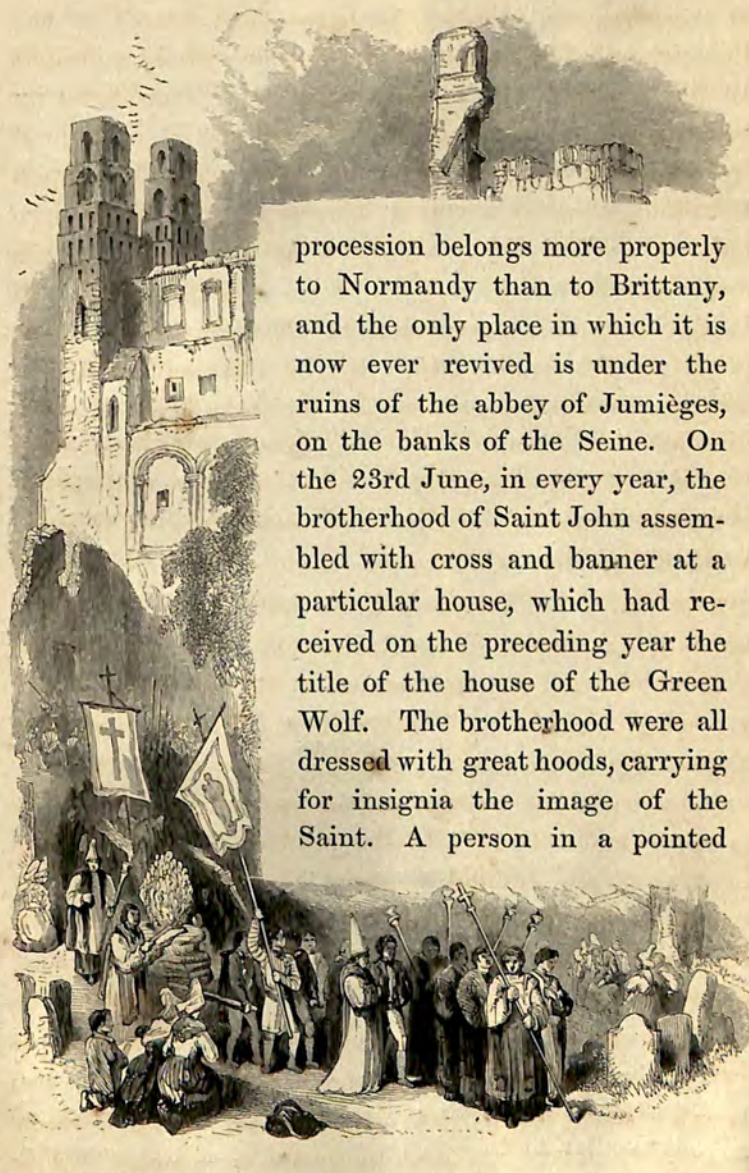
dies, the child is adopted by all the other mothers. The priest selects one to whom he confides it, and she receives the sacred charge as a boon from the Almighty. If they are too poor for any one of them to take the sole charge of the child, it is received amongst them in common. One lodges it, and the rest watch over it, and tend it, hour by hour, alternately. It is the invariable usage of the nurse, when she takes her turn, to make the sign of the cross, and sprinkle the linen with holy water. Every thing connected with infancy is associated with pious feelings, and fenced round by gracious safeguards. Nobody passes a woman carrying a child without exclaiming, "God bless you!" If this salutation be omitted, the mother thinks you have thrown an evil eye upon her offspring. Even inveterate hatreds are disarmed by this tender custom, and a man's most implacable enemy will never strike him while he has a child in his arms.

Almost all the popular usages of the Bretons have their spring either in their religious notions, or in superstitions which claim a sort of poetical kindred with religion. The ceremonies of the Church are here preserved with more gravity and strictness than in any other part of Europe. The fête days of saints are solemnised with a degree of pomp which could hardly be expected from a population so poor and scattered. Nor are they less remarkable for their picturesque effects. In some cases the people gather into such crowds, that the interior of the church, from the altar through the nave, and in every nook and cranny of the private chapels, becomes illuminated with a forest of candles. Their pilgrimages,—especially that of Nôtre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours,—many of which take place at

night, consisting of vast processions through the least frequented parts of the country, resemble long trains of phantoms holding wax-lights in their hands. Every fête is marked by distinct features peculiar to itself. That of St. John is, perhaps, on the whole, the most striking. Throughout the day the poor children go about begging contributions for lighting the fires of Monsieur St. Jean; and, towards evening, one fire is gradually followed by two, three, four; then a thousand gleam out from the hill tops, till the whole country glows under the conflagration. Sometimes the priests light the first fire in the market-place; and sometimes it is lighted by an angel who is made to descend, by a mechanical device, from the top of the church with a flambeau in her hand, setting the pile in a blaze, and flying back again. The young people dance with a bewildering activity about these fires, for there is a superstition amongst them that if they dance round nine fires before midnight, they will be married in the ensuing year. Seats are placed close to the flaming piles for the dead, whose spirits are supposed to come there for the melancholy pleasure of listening once more to their native songs, and contemplating the lively measures of their youth. Fragments of the torches on those occasions are preserved as spells against thunder and nervous diseases, and the crown of flowers which surmounted the principal fire is in such request as to produce tumultuous jealousy for its possession. At Brest, where the crowd, swelled by sailors, is considerably more riotous than elsewhere, there is a wild torch dance which winds up the night with savage uproar. There can be no doubt that this festival is a relique of Druidism, and that the fires

had their origin in the worship of the sun. They are, in every respect, identical with the *Beal teinidh* of the Phœnicians. The custom of kindling fires about midnight at the moment of the summer solstice, considered by the ancients a season of divinations, was a custom of remote antiquity, and seems to have been grafted upon Christianity by a common movement of all modern nations. When the year began in June, there was a direct significance in this *feu de joie*, which was intended to celebrate the commencement of vegetation, and to propitiate the fruits of the year by vows and sacrifices: but the usage still continued, by the force of habit, after its symbolical meaning had long ceased. That St. John should have inherited the fires of the sun is not half so curious as that the Christian festival should have retained some of the rites which were potent only in the Pagan interpretation. Thus the ancients used to carry away the burning flambeaux, in the belief that as they shook off showers of sparks from them they expelled every evil,—a practice which is still followed in Cornwall and other places: the dance itself, for which there is always, to be sure, a sufficient excuse in the animal spirits of the revellers, had reference to the produce of the vine: and in some parts of Ireland the people still exhibit an implicit reverence for the old faith, by making their cattle pass through the fire for the purpose of charming them against disorders.

Connected with the festivities dedicated to St. John is the famous procession of *Le Loup vert*, one of the last traces of the solemn mirth which, in former ages, was so frequently mixed up with religious ceremonies. This



procession belongs more properly to Normandy than to Brittany, and the only place in which it is now ever revived is under the ruins of the abbey of Jumièges, on the banks of the Seine. On the 23rd June, in every year, the brotherhood of Saint John assembled with cross and banner at a particular house, which had received on the preceding year the title of the house of the Green Wolf. The brotherhood were all dressed with great hoods, carrying for insignia the image of the Saint. A person in a pointed

bonnet and green costume tricked out with ribands, assuming the character of the Green Wolf, placed himself at the head of the procession, which marched away singing the hymn of St. John, to the accompaniment of two bells incessantly rung by a young man in a surplice. Salvos of musketry announced their departure, and when they arrived at a certain place, they were met by the curé and his clergy, who conducted them to the church, where vespers were celebrated, after which they returned to the house of the Wolf. At the close of the day a bonfire was lighted, the whole company performing a variety of evolutions, during which they elected the Wolf for the following year, to the infinite delight of the wondering crowd at their heels. Then the Wolf in office was raised on the shoulders of some of the brotherhood, who pretended to throw him into the bonfire, but the catastrophe was suddenly averted by a chanson, of which the following are the opening stanzas, sung by an old man of the village :—

Voici la Saint-Jean
L'heureuse journée,
Que nos amoureux
Vont à l'assemblée ;
Marchons, joli cœur,
La lune est levée.

Que nos amoureux
Vont à l'assemblée ;
Le mien y sera,
J'en suis assurée ;
Marchons, joli cœur,
La lune est levée.

The whole party then returned to the house of the Wolf, where they sat down to a repast *tout en maigre*, at which nobody is allowed to speak of business, or use words of

levity. At midnight the hoods are thrown of, and everybody is free to indulge himself to the top of his bent. This festival is renewed the next day, and continued sometimes for nearly a week.

The Pardons are the favourite points of meeting for the youth of both sexes. Here they freely indulge in their national games, and above all in the dance. The excitement of these scenes can hardly be understood by the civilised reader whose taste is subdued by the refinements of the modern ball-room; nor, without having actually witnessed a Breton festival, is it possible to conceive the frenzy of delight with which it is enjoyed by the people. Their principal dances are composed of popular *chansons,* played upon an ancient national instrument, the *bombarde,* accompanied by the *binion,* a species of bagpipe, which serves to mark the time with rude but emphatic precision. The form of the dance may be best described as consisting of a succession of gyrations, the dancers whirling themselves round in a circle, with linked hands, at a rate of perilous rapidity. This is called the *ronde,* and is probably the most ancient of all known figures. Sometimes they perform this dizzy evolution with their arms interlaced, when it takes a somewhat more complicated and dazzling aspect. In this shape it changes its name to the *bal.* Something of the excess with which these pleasures are entered into may be accounted for by the fact, that it is only in their youth and girlhood the Breton females have any chance of relaxation or enjoyment. It is the first joyous bound of the courser into the circus, when he is led round to be familiarised with the glittering scene: all the rest is severe exertion and hard work. The

Breton women, the themes of all their poets, the subjects of innumerable elegies, songs, and romances, *before* marriage, are placed *after* marriage as low down in the social scale as the women of the Asiatics. In the country they hold an inferior rank; wait upon their husbands at table; and never speak to them but in terms of humility and respect. Amongst the lowest classes of all, they toil in the open fields and surrender up their lives to the most laborious drudgery. And so ends that dream of life, which begins in *chansons* and dances, and sets in squalid slavery!

But in the midst of their drudgery they are cheered by the voices of the young, in whom the games and romps and innocent sports of their childhood are revived. Few countries have a greater variety of amusements, and it is not a little suggestive of the identity of the sources of pleasure—perhaps of their limitation—to find amongst these primitive people precisely the same class of plays and diversions which entertained the Greeks and Romans, and which entertain the English and most other nations to the present day. The children trundle hoops, embellished with rattles for bells, the *trochus* of the ancients; build card houses; play at blindman's buff, odd or even, and head or tail; gallop upon sticks; and draw miniature chariots with miniature horses: all of which are derived direct from classical examples. Then the grown-up people play at bowls, cards, chess, nine-pins, dice, and twenty other games of skill and hazard, which have come down to them in the same way.

The disorderly game of *Soule* (of which I shall speak at large presently) has been gradually abolished in most

parts of the country. It now lingers chiefly in the environs of Vannes, where the people still retain much of their original barbaric taste for raids and bloodshed. It is occasionally revived, also, in the distant commune of Calvados, in the province of Normandy.* A healthier exercise and more inspiring pastime survives to the Bretons in their great wrestling matches, which are celebrated with all the popular ardour and ceremonial detail of one of the Olympic games.

In their preparations for their manly pastimes, they do not always rely upon natural means, but have recourse, not only to the miraculous waters of certain fountains but to particular herbs, which they gather on the first Saturday of the month, and which they believe have the power of rendering them invincible in the *lutte*. The employment of a secret advantage, or what they suppose to be one, would imply a spirit of jockeyship wholly inconsistent with the general integrity of the Breton character; but the proceeding carries so heavy a penalty with it that it is very rarely acted upon. The wrestler who fortifies himself with these enchanted herbs risks the perdition of his soul: a sufficient guarantee against the frequent use of so perilous a spell. It is the only instance in which the superstitions of the Bretons recognise the possibility of entering into a contract with the powers of darkness. Nor does it even appear that any thing approaching to a specific admission of such a contract takes place; although

* At a recent sitting of the Société d'Archéologie of Avranches, a paper was read by M. Mangon-Delalande upon the game of *Soule*, in which he referred to it as an ancient Norman custom. Any of the Breton antiquaries could have set him right upon the point.

the hazard avowedly annexed to the charm implies the tacit understanding of some such responsibility.

The credulity of the Bretons is certainly not chargeable with melodramatic absurdities of this kind. They do not believe that a man can lease out his soul for a consideration. They have no witch-glen bazaars for the sale of inexhaustible riches, or parchment deeds scrawled in blood for reversionary interests in eternity. They are simply the passive recipients of that large class of influences which, from time immemorial, have been associated in the popular mind with the Elements and the Seasons, Night and the Grave, Life and Death. Their creed in this respect, embracing a variety of singular items peculiar to themselves, includes most of the superstitions common to other countries. To the peasant of Lower Brittany, the cries of crows and screech-owls convey a sinister presage. He believes in the fairies who come to warm themselves at his fireside, who dance in the light of the moon, or sit meditating on the sea-shore. He shudders at apparitions and at sounds in the air charged with messages from the world of spirits; and he yields implicit credence to the functions attached to hobgoblins, were-wolves, and the demons that combat with guardian angels for the souls of men. Many of these superstitions are intimately interwoven with religion itself.

It is a generally received belief that two crows attend upon every house. When the head of a family is dying the ominous birds perch on the roof, and commence their dismal screaming, which never ceases till the body is carried out; whereupon the birds vanish and are never seen again. The approach of death, heralded by numerous

signs, is connected in one locality with a remarkable superstition. Between Quimper and Chateaulin, strange-looking men are occasionally encountered on the high-ways, habited in white linen, with long straggling hair and coal-black beards, armed with heavy sticks, and carrying dingy wallets slung over their shoulders. Their aspect is in the last degree dark and sinister. In the night time they take the least frequented routes. They never sing while they are walking, nor speak to any body they meet, nor put their hands to their slouched hats with that politeness which is so general in Brittany. Sometimes they are accompanied by large fawn-coloured dogs. The custom-house officers tell you that these fellows are smugglers, who go about the country with salt and tobacco; but the peasantry, who know better, assert that they are demons, whose dreadful business it is to conduct doomed souls into the next world. Wherever there is a person at the point of death, they may be seen prowling about the house like hungry wolves. If the guardian angel of the dying man, summoned by repeated prayers, do not arrive in time, the white man pounces on the deathbed at the last gasp, seizes the departing soul, crams it into his wallet, and carries it off to the marshes of St. Michel, into which he flings it, and where it must remain until it is delivered by vows and masses.

The belief, common to all catholic countries, that the souls of men who died without the benefits of absolution, are wandering about in excruciating misery supplicating for intercession, is varied in different localities according to circumstances. There is a desolate plain between Auray and Pluviguer, a mournful stretch of uncultivated

ground, formerly the scene of a sanguinary conflict between the houses of Blois and Montfort. Many hundred soldiers fell in the battle, and remains of armour and mouldering bones have frequently been turned up there. The tradition runs that the souls of these poor fellows, still compelled to haunt the dust they once inhabited, rise from the ground at a certain hour every night, and run the whole length of the funereal field. The moaning of the winds over this exposed surface is regarded as the expression of the anguish of the unshrived spirits, entreating for masses. The worst of it is, that they are condemned to undergo this hopeless nightly exercise until doomsday, and to gallop on in a straight line, no matter what obstacles they may encounter. Woe to the traveller who falls in with one of these unhappy ghosts. The touch is death.

The remains of Celtic superstitions may be distinctly traced in some of the legendary usages, thinly disguised under Christian forms. Thus in some places they carry the statue of a saint in procession to the charmed fountains, and plunge it into the water, by way of purifying themselves of the sins of the past year: an obvious relic of the pagan custom of washing idols. The *arbres à niches*, trees converted into arcades by drawing the branches over into an arch, in which crosses or images are set up, are also derived from the Celts, who worshipped all natural objects, and trees amongst the rest, believing them to be animated by supernatural intelligences. Then the stones and monuments of the Druids have particular virtues ascribed to them. Some conceal buried treasures; some, like the forge of Wayland Smith in Berkshire, possess magical powers; and an immense stone, poised on its

inverted apex, called by the French the *pierre vacillante*, which the finger of a child would easily shake, will not move if attempted by the whole strength of a man whose wife has deceived him. At Carnac, if you pass the cemetery at midnight, you find all the tombs open, the church illuminated, and two thousand spectres on their knees listening to Death delivering a sermon from the top of the choir, in the dress of a priest. Some of the peasants will confidently affirm that they have beheld from a distance the light of the numerous wax-tapers, and have even heard the confused voice of the preacher.

The fairy lore of Brittany is literally located among these monuments. The Roches aux Fées (for there are many besides the celebrated one near Rennes) must not be approached after nightfall. It is here the fairies hold their court, and dance their elfish hays in the moonlight. The barrows are called the châteaux of the poulpicans. The poulpicans are no other than the husbands of the fairies, and make a very prominent figure in the mischievous gambols of "Fairy-Londe." The fairies are fair handsome women, conceived in the most perfect French taste, but their husbands are little squat ugly black men, who take the utmost delight in all sorts of whimsical and malicious jokes; playing Will-o'-the-Wisp to the poor herdsmen in the woods, when they are looking after the strayed cattle, and seizing young girls by the neck as they are wending home at night, when the offended damsels, horribly vexed at having such a freedom taken with them, turn round in a furious passion to scold the supposed clown, but get nothing for their pains but the far-off laughter of the frolicsome poulpicans. A thousand

legends are related about these humorous sprites. Often in the winter nights, cries of apparent agony are heard outside as the family sit listening to the crackling of the fire in the chimney nook. The children think it is the wind straining the pulleys in the neighbouring pits, or the wings of a windmill creaking on their axis, or the twirling post placed on the great apple-tree to frighten off the birds: but the old people shake their heads, and declare that these shrieking noises are the cries of the poulpicans calling to each other to run round the cromlechs on the hill side. Those who are wise will never stir out on such occasions, but place a vase full of millet at the foot of their beds. The object of this precaution is to catch the poulpicans in a trap should they venture to come into the house; for they are sure to overturn the vase in their tricksy fashion, and they are then compelled, by a strange necessity of their nature, to pick it all up again, grain by grain, an employment which will fully occupy them till day-light, when they are obliged to abscond.

The Evil-Eye, familiar to us in Scotch and Irish traditions, is universal in Brittany, where its influence is supposed to extend to the communication of infectious diseases. They give to this malevolent fascination the name of the Evil-Wind, under the impression that the pestilential effluvium, which streams from the eyes of such persons, is carried by the air to the individuals who are struck by the contagion.

In the enumeration of these fanciful terrors, the hobgoblin, a venerable sprite, must not be overlooked. The Breton hobgoblin is a sort of harlequin among the fiends. He takes the shape of different animals, and is also

answerable for the demoniacal pranks of the night-mare. The loupgarou is another formidable monster, whose business consists in all sorts of depredations in the vicinity of towns and villages. The word *garou* belongs to the dialect of Morbihan, and signifies a cruel or savage wolf. The loupgarou is the *lycanthrope* of the French, a lineal descendant of the prowling were-wolf of the Greeks and Romans.

A people who indulge so largely in supernatural luxuries, may fairly be allowed to pamper their imagination with charms and exorcisms; although it must be frankly conceded to the Bretons, that, except where their religion seems to suggest or foster such operations, they do not often resort to them. Everybody who knows Brittany, knows that the buckwheat which is cultivated in such vast quantities over the surface, and which gives such a sickly uniformity to the aspect of the country, is regarded by the natives with feelings of enthusiasm. Buckwheat is much the same to a Breton as the leek to a Welshman, or the music of the Ranz des Vaches to a Swiss. It is the key to the whole system of national mnemonics. I remember a young Breton lady, who, after an absence of two or three years, ran out into the fields immediately upon her return to her native province, and, flinging herself down amongst the wheat, burst into a flood of tears at seeing it once more. A stranger can thoroughly comprehend the nature of this feeling, although, stepping for the first time into the wheat-ground, steaming with that peculiar odour by which it is distinguished, he may have some difficulty in understanding how even the most patriotic ardour can overcome the disagreeable olfactory sensation it provokes. This wheat, however, is converted into the

main article of consumption by the peasantry; the most substantial reason that can be assigned for their inordinate admiration of it; and the black bread thus produced becomes an active minister in a variety of conjurations. Whether the virtue is supposed to reside originally in the wheat, or is only reflected back upon it by the influence attributed to the bread itself, we have no means of determining; but it is certain that on many occasions of extremity the bread is resorted to not merely as a sort of sanctified agent, but as a vehicle of divination. When a first-born child is taken to the church to be baptised, the mother hangs a piece of black bread round its neck to indicate the poverty of her circumstances; seeing which, the evil spirits do not consider it worth their while to shower misfortunes on the infant, and so they are cheated of their victim with their eyes open. When a person is drowned, the family assemble in mourning, and throw a piece of black bread, with a wax-light on it, into the water; it is sure to float to the spot where the body lies. When anything is stolen, they have a certain method of detecting the thief by flinging pieces of black bread, of equal size, into the water, pronouncing at each cast the name of a suspected person; when the real robber is named, the piece representing him is sure to sink. It might be supposed that the certainty of failure in a multitude of instances, would at last have the inevitable effect of exposing the fallaciousness of the test; but the experience of all human nature proves that the frustration of such experiments is attended by no other result than that of fixing the delusion still more deeply. Such articles of belief do not depend upon the efficacy of trial, but upon

the strength of faith; and failure, instead of endangering their credit, deepens the halo of superstition by which they are invested. A believer will believe any thing rather than that "his faith is in the wrong;" and it is so easy to shift the responsibility of disappointment upon the blunders of manipulation, that he has always a convenient excuse at hand which will cover any imaginable dilemma, and even transform the most palpable defeat into a victory.

In the districts that lie upon the seashore, many of the popular superstitions are full of poetical beauty, and appeal forcibly to the imagination by the elegiac pathos with which they colour the actual circumstances of the people. Here the population consists chiefly of poor fishermen and their families, engaged incessantly in the most precarious of livelihoods, and living upon an iron-bound coast, where their perilous craft is constantly prosecuted at the risk of life itself. The solitude of these scenes is intense; and the tempests which brood over the waters, strewing the shore with wrecks through all seasons of the year, help to increase the gloom which acts so strongly even upon those who are accustomed to contemplate the sea under all its aspects. The frequent loss of husbands and sons, the roar of the waves, and the atmospheric effects which in such situations present so many strange illusions to the eye, are well calculated to work upon the terrors of the people, and supply them with melancholy fancies when they sit watching at midnight to catch the voices of their friends through the intervals of the storm. Their superstitions are generally shaped to this end; and phantoms and death-warnings are familiar to them all.

In the long winter nights when the fishermen's wives,

whose husbands are out at sea, are scared from their uneasy sleep by the rising of the tempest, they listen breathlessly for certain sounds to which they attach a fatal meaning. If they hear a low and monotonous noise of waters, falling drop by drop at the foot of their bed, and find that it has not been caused by natural means, and that the floor is dry, it is the unerring token of shipwreck. The sea has made them widows! This fearful superstition, I believe, is confined to the isle of Artz, where a still more striking phenomenon is said to take place. Sometimes in the twilight, they say, large white women may be seen moving slowly from the neighbouring islands over the sea, and seating themselves upon its borders. There they remain throughout the night, digging the sands with their naked feet, and stripping off between their fingers the leaves of rosemary flowers culled upon the beach. These women, according to the tradition, are natives of the islands, who marrying strangers, and dying in their sins, have returned home to their beloved birthplace to beg the prayers of their friends. A great number of their superstitions turn upon this clinging love for the scenes of their youth.

It is a general opinion amongst them that a hurricane can never be appeased until the waves have rejected and flung upon the shore the dead bodies of heretics who perished by shipwreck, and all other unclean bodies. This is a fragment of the old Druidical worship: a dim recollection of that mystical sympathy which was held by the Celt as existing between the purity of the waters and the soul of man. The idea was originally derived, probably, from observation of some such natural purifying process

as that of the Alpine glaciers, which have a constant tendency to throw up to the sides the heaps of stones and mud they accumulate in their course.

There is a special day set apart for the anniversary of the shipwrecked dead, called the *Jour de Morts*. On this occasion the winds and waters are brought into active requisition to supply materials for the spectral drama. When the wind ripples the sea into wreaths of foam, the fishermen fancy they hear melancholy murmurs stealing over the waves, and behold the souls of the poor creatures who were wrecked rise upon the summits of the billows, and then in ghostly grief, pale and fugitive, melt away like froth. If one of these sad spirits happens to encounter the soul of some well-beloved friend, the air is filled with cries of despair at the first glance of recognition. Sometimes the fishermen, sitting in their huts at night, hear a strange and mysterious mélange of sounds over the bay, now low and sweet, now loud and turbulent, now trembling, groaning, and whistling with the rising of the surge. These mixed clamours of cries and voices indicate the general meeting of the poor ghosts, at which it appears they hold a sort of marine *conversazione*, and diligently relate their histories to each other.

At the seaside village of St. Gildas, the fishermen who lead evil lives are often disturbed at midnight by three knocks at their door from an invisible hand. They immediately get up, and impelled by some supernatural power, which they cannot resist and dare not question, go down to the beach, where they find long black boats, apparently empty, yet sunk so deeply in the water as to be nearly level with it. The moment they enter, a large white sail

streams out from the top of the mast, and the barque is carried out to sea with irresistible rapidity, never to be seen by mortal eyes again. The belief is that these boats are freighted with condemned souls, and that the fishermen are doomed to pilot them over the waste of waters until the day of judgment. This legend, like many others, is of Celtic origin, and is related by Procopius.

Such are a few of the salient superstitions of a people not yet embraced in the girdle of modern civilisation, who have derived none of their notions from books, and who realise in their living faith all those characteristics of Romance which we are too apt to believe, in our sober England, have long since passed out of the world. To the Breton, the elements of that Romance are part and parcel of his daily existence; he breathes the very atmosphere of the middle ages, which are not revived, but continued in him; and acts to the life the whole round of their enchantments, without being in the slightest degree conscious of the performance. How long the people are destined to preserve these peculiar attributes is a problem rapidly hastening towards solution. The railroad is the giant annihilator of old customs and provincial manners. The moment its fiery chariot penetrates the interior of Britanny, we may take our last look upon the Armorica of the ancients.

XXIV.

RENNES.

THE distance from Dinan to Rennes is thirty-five miles, over a capital road. The transition from old, close, dingy, picturesque Dinan to the fine, open, flourishing city of Rennes, offers as complete a contrast as a peasant of the middle ages and a modern beau; and the difference is much of the same kind.

Rennes is a very ancient city, or rather was a very ancient city until the beginning of the last century, when a great part of the old town was burnt down. The new town which has sprung up in its place is one of the handsomest in France; and you are afforded an excellent means of appreciating its advantages by the immediate contiguity of what is called the lower town, where the houses are as incommodious, and the streets as narrow, dirty and irregular, as if the time-honoured Gauls still dwelt in them.

The first thing that strikes the tourist upon entering this new town is its extraordinary cleanliness, quietude, and airiness. You will hardly believe yourself in France as you move up one of these spacious well-paved streets, which are laid out with a magnificence and regularity very rare indeed in this country. The houses are lofty, and of

proportionate dimensions, and the grey stone of which they are built gives them an imposing aspect of sombre elegance. The public squares and buildings are on a similar scale of magnitude. The cathedral, erected on

the site of the old church, where the counts and dukes of Brittany, after spending a whole night in vows and prayers before the altar, received the crown and sword from the hands of the bishop, is a structure of considerable splendour in the *ensemble*, but of the most singular taste in its details. The façade is decorated with a succession of columns in no less than four orders of architecture, Tuscan, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite. The effect of this confusion may be readily conceived. The interior is vast, and by its grandeur and simplicity makes some amends for the chaos on the outside.

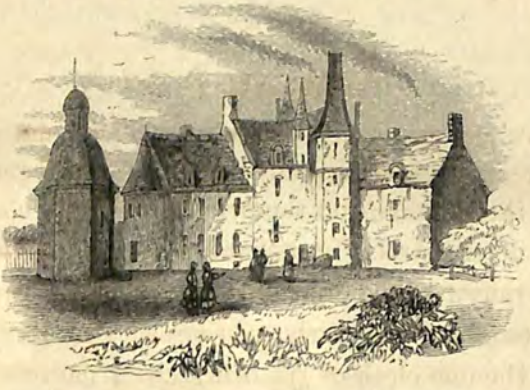
The *Bibliothèque* is one of the best in France, rich in rare and expensive works, and ancient Breton MSS. If we may judge, also, by the great number of book-shops and reading-rooms, the people of Rennes cultivate litera-

ture assiduously. We cannot say so much for their taste in the fine arts. The collection of paintings at the Museum is below mediocrity. We find the names of Vandyk, Paul Veronese, and Rubens in the catalogue, but, with the exception of half-a-dozen pictures, there is scarcely a single work worth the time expended on the examination of the gallery. The Museum ought to be visited, however, for the sake of a picture which is ascribed to the good King René, who sought in his palette consolation for the loss of empire. The subject of this antique piece is Death, very oddly treated and executed in the crudest manner; but curious from age and association, and from the scarcity of similar specimens.

The promenades of Rennes are the attractions upon which the inhabitants rest their principal claim to the gratitude of strangers. That which is called the Mall, runs upon a jetty between two canals, and is charmingly sequestered under the shadows of over-arching trees. Here, when the weather is fine, the people swarm in the evenings, and linger long after dark to enjoy the solitude of the place, which, considering the nature of the locality, is dismal enough in certain seasons of the year. In summer the canals dry up, and their slimy deposits infect the air; in winter, the cold of the spot is intense; but in the autumn and spring it is impossible to resist these secluded alleys. The upper promenade on the heights is thickly planted, and of great extent. It makes a grand sweep on the hill, is everywhere covered in with foliage, and commands several fine views. There is a statue of Du Guesclin (who was born here) on the platform close to the promenade of Le Thabor. It represents him as a thick-

set, stout, ill-favoured, but resolute man. All statues and pictures of the Breton hero agree in these points.

The tourist may be recommended to make a little excursion from Rennes to the Château des Rochers, near Vitré, the residence of Madame de Sévigné, whose celebrity in this part of the country attaches a strong



interest to all memorials connected with her. This château, surrounded by a large park and extensive gardens, is a curious example, in excellent preservation, of the architecture of the period. It is cumbrous and massive, although the great height of the elevation helps to lighten its gothic heaviness. The green cabinet in which Madame de Sévigné received the *gouvernante* of Brittany, her bed-chamber and a small room, without a chimney, in which she wrote many of her charming letters, are still shown; the principal attraction is her portrait, said to be painted by Mignard, the colours of which are as fresh as if it had been only recently executed. In this picture, Madame de Sévigné is represented in a Greek coiffure, with a *fichu* of gauze open in the front, and a mantle thrown in long folds over her shoulders.

XXV.

SOLDIERS AND PRIESTS.

THERE are two classes amongst the population which, in different ways, are equally offensive to the English traveller—the military and the priests. They are constantly abroad in the streets, promenades, highways, hotels, diligences, railways, and steamboats. Go where you will and at all hours, late and early, you are sure to meet a specimen of the one cloth or the other; and there is not much to choose between them. The vivacity, voracity, and thunder-clap style of the military, who walk the earth as if they had a mind to trample it out, is hardly more troublesome than the eternal loquacity and cool familiarity of the priest. The one takes you by storm, the other undermines you; the one assails you with fury and uproar, the other with a low, unceasing, and insidious murmur.

It is always difficult to determine the rank or pretensions of the *militaire* who sits next you at the *table d'hôte*, or thrusts his cane into your face in the railway carriage; he may have seen a hundred campaigns, or have only just come off his first drill—there is the same fiery assurance in his eye, and fierceness in his crisp moustache. The matter of rank or service makes no social or visible distinction. The raw recruit smokes his cigar as belligerently

as the sturdiest veteran. He may be a gentleman, born in some old painted *château*, and introduced into life under the brilliant auspices of the *salons* of Paris; or he may be a peasant, elevated on a sudden from the *chaumière* to the *caserne*, and intoxicated with the inspirations of his new position. It is much the same thing, so far as his surface manners are concerned, and his way of opening the oyster of the world. One cannot help thinking, nevertheless, that there must be an innate difference between the man who springs from the middle or upper ranks, and is (so to speak) educated *for* his sword, and the man who rises from the lowest grades, and is educated *by* his sword. The broad fact is glaring enough, and can hardly be disputed, let it go for much or little. Even in France, where the genius of the people and the spirit of the national institutions tend to obliterate all conventional distinctions, it is universally felt and understood, let them say what they please to the contrary. The system which admits and encourages the free ascent of the soldier from the drill to the council-table has its practical advantages, and was worked with remarkable success by Napoleon. The doubt is, whether by thus placing a premium upon rough energy and rugged courage, (qualities the most likely to elevate the soldier under such a system, and which, most of all, seem to stand in need of discipline and control,) the character of an army may not become ultimately deteriorated and debauched. Good soldiers are, probably, produced by this process; but the pure metal, alloyed by amalgamation with coarser elements, must ultimately lose its ascendancy. The individual may be made a better fighting man, but it will be at the risk of all his other

relations with society. Hence that savage air which in France latterly distinguishes the *militaire*. The presence of ladies no longer restrains the turbulent bravado of his manners; he glories in a rude and menacing exterior; and regards the refinements and courtesies of life as reliques of an age of effeminacy. All this is the more striking in a country the most renowned for its gallantry in the history of civilisation, and may be admitted as a proof that military power, when it is fed by such means, has a downward tendency towards the point of brute violence. Nor is it very certain that men become braver by casting off the amenities of social intercourse. The polished chivalry of earlier times was a safer nurse of true courage.

These military people are formidable in public rooms, where they make so outrageous a clatter with their swords, drink, roar, and sing with such topping riotousness, and tell such rampant stories, so spotted over with gross jokes, that a quiet, bewildered Englishman, who finds himself in such a company, is glad to escape from it, even if he is forced to leave his mid-dinner *entrées* on the table behind him.

There is this difference between the soldiery and the priests, that the former treat you with sovereign contempt, and rattle on as if they had the whole room to themselves; while the latter always faithful to their mission, and eager to pick up strangers, talk at you, or to you, or through you. This is literally the sole business of their lives—to extend their influence, to enlarge their whispering circle, to gather social and religious statistics, to rend the veil of the domestic sanctuary, and penetrate to the core of its

privacy. They exercise in their own communities a searching family inquisition which, if the truth dare be spoken, renders them odious amongst the educated and thinking classes. Wherever it is possible, without offence, the door is shut against them, and with good reason. Through the confessional they acquire an intimate knowledge of family secrets, and by a subtle use of their information, they set people by the ears, that they may come in afterwards and still the storms of their own raising. Their interference thus becomes indispensable, and their spiritual authority firmly fixed. They are indefatigable gossips, and skilful judges of character. They know everybody's business, and everybody's relations and interrelations; by keeping a vigilant watch upon passing affairs, they are enabled to evolve new trains of circumstances, and to wield an apparently mysterious power over the lives and fortunes of their communicants; familiar with all the antecedents of families, they can, to a certain extent, shape their future destinies; profoundly acquainted with the tempers, passions, designs, and resources of individuals, they render all subservient to the working of the close details by which they are enabled to spread an intricate network of priestly rule over the surface of society. The said network has been violently broken here and there, and in some places silently gnawed in fear and trembling; but its texture is, nevertheless, strong and secure, and has been cast over its victims with such adroitness that they are scarcely conscious of their real helplessness, or unwilling to avow it, from a natural apprehension of consequences. This fatal influence is mainly won and exercised through the women. They are the keys of domestic life.

Men, early scattered abroad in professions, have their faculties sharpened by collisions with the world, and evade or defy the spiritual tyranny. But women are stationary, and always accessible, and their fears, tenderness, and credulity, are easily subdued. The priests train them from childhood for their purpose, flatter their weaknesses, insensibly obtain a complete control over their feelings, and send them into the world to diffuse the superstitions by which they are enslaved. Women are, in fact, the most successful agents and missionaries of the Church. Upon them the maintenance of this monstrous machinery reposes. Through them the priest probes society to its centre, and establishes a system of *espionage*, which developes to him its most secret springs of action. And he is in the best possible position to profit by his knowledge. He is coiled up, like the spider, in his own meshes, with a perfect command over his sensitive lines; he has no interests in common with the community for whose follies and vices he lays these complex snares; no stake in the future progress of society; he lives for himself and his order alone; he belongs to an isolated class, and preys upon the rest.

XXVI.

THE GAME OF SOULE.

The country we are now crossing, from Rennes to the Loire, especially the department of Morbihan, stretching westward to the sea, is the last refuge of the old Breton customs. Here is the great plain of Carnac (a name derived from the Celtic *carn* or *cairn*, a heap of stones), covered with eleven parallel lines of solemn Druidical monuments, consisting of enormous granite blocks, upwards of four thousand in number, and ranged with the regularity of an avenue of planted trees. They are generally fixed with the smaller end upon the earth, and in many cases large flat stones placed upon two of the perpendicular blocks form open gateways. "On ne peut les considérer," says M. de la Sauvagère, "sans en être étonné. J'en ai cubé qui doivent peser plus de quatre-vingts milliers; il est inconcevable de quelles machines on a pu se servir pour les mettre debout; et, ce qui est encore extrêmement singulier, c'est qu'elles sont presque toutes plantées de façon que la plus grande grosseur est en haut et la moindre en bas, de sorte qu'il y en a plusieurs qui sont portées comme sur au pivot."*

* Recueil d'Antiquités.

Of the primeval customs which yet linger amongst the people, and which are popularly supposed to have an origin coeval with these strange monuments (concerning the uses of which the world is still ignorant), the game of *soule* is the most remarkable. The *soule* is a leather ball, resembling our tennis-ball, which is thrown up into the air, and contended for by the players, ranged into two parties, who pursue the struggle, by kicking, banging, and flinging the ball until one or the other shall have succeeded in conveying it across the boundary of the commune in which the play commenced. In some places the game is won by carrying off the ball, and lodging it in a house. The Breton *savans*, who are never at a loss for an ingenious speculation in support of their antiquities, affirm that this game is a relique of the worship of the sun. The spherical figure of the ball, they say, is purely typical, and it is thrown into the air as if it were intended to touch the sun, and contended for when it falls as if, by having been projected in that direction, it had become a sacred object! This curious notion is founded upon the ancient usage of extending the hand towards the sun, then drawing it back to the mouth and kissing it with devotion, the superstition being that the kiss is thus communicated to the sun itself. The connection with the solar worship is further attempted to be shown by sundry ingenious speculations upon the derivation of the word *soule*. One philologist traces it to the Breton word *sul*, which he says signifies sun, and is pronounced like *soule;* and another is at considerable pains to prove that *di sul*, the Breton name for Sunday, signifies *jour de soleil* in the Celtic. M. Mahe, a French archæologist, distinguished as much

for good sense as erudition, sweeps away all these theories, and discovers the probable etymon of the word in the *sol* of the Romans.*

The game is now rarely played, except in Morbihan, where its violence is well adapted to the barbarous character of a race who still retain in their *fêtes* and customs the savage spirit of a remote age. *Soule* is by no means a mere country pastime in this wild district, but a terrible festival, in which a wide indulgence is granted to the people to run into the most ferocious excesses, and to avenge their private quarrels under the mask of a dramatic fury. The day of the *soule* is looked forward to as a day of reckoning for all wrongs and grudges. No man can foresee its issue, or calculate upon its incidents. He only knows that it is a day of assassination, and that he must be prepared to give as well as to take revenge. "Et quel est celui qui n'a pas quelqu'un à tuer?" was the significant question of one of these *souleurs* to M. Souvestre, who has collected some amusing notes upon his native Brittany.

The hostilities of parishes, and the jealousies which have subsisted, from time immemorial, between the rural population and the *bourgeoisie*, furnish additional elements for feeding the fury of this deadly game. The rancour with which the peasantry regard the citizens, on account of the superior privileges they enjoy, finds a vent on these occasions which is well understood by both parties. Under such circumstances the *soule* literally resolves itself into a pitched battle between antagonistic classes, who, drawn

* Essai sur les Antiquités du Département du Morbihan.

out into opposite camps, prepare for the combat with as much earnestness and with as grave intentions as if the existence of their orders depended on the result. The citizens are quite as eager as the peasantry. It is the country against the town. A vital question, in fact, is concealed under the pretence of a holiday amusement. Young men in their finest dresses, fathers of families, and people of condition, are found mixed up in the miscellaneous gathering with workmen out of factories, and crowds of labourers collected from the fields. The communes pour out their entire population to witness the exciting spectacle, and when the players arrive the lists are proclaimed with the formality of a tournament. The combatants are carefully attired in dresses that fit closely to their persons, to give free play to their limbs, and wear leather straps buckled round their waists. The movements of the peasants are generally slow and cautious, while the townspeople, with quicker instinct, and, perhaps, a certain sense of superiority, advance into the lists with more vivacity and boldness. When they are all ready, the conditions of the game are declared in a loud voice by a person who fulfils the functions of a herald, and the prize to be awarded to the conquerors is exhibited; the two parties then withdraw at equal distances from a certain point, the ball is flung into the air, and the play begins. Some awkward attempts are made in the course of the contention to imitate the English art of wrestling, but it is hardly necessary to say that they degenerate into brutal violence.

M. Souvestre gives us an animated description of the progress of a game of *soule*, from which it appears that the

contest is at first amongst the weakest players, the more muscular combatants reserving their strength for the final struggle, contenting themselves in the beginning with looking on and encouraging their comrades.* However, one by one, they rush into the crowd, and, at last, the whole field becomes engaged in the furious *mêlée*. The *soule*, taken and retaken, is already far from the spot where it was launched; the borders of the commune are approached; and the madness of the scene is at its height. All restraint is now cast away; from mere wrestling, the combatants proceed to blows; loud shrieks, and imprecations, are heard on all sides, and, drunk with frenzy, the entire multitude may be seen interlocked in a dense body, out of which countless arms are wildly tossed aloft in mortal struggle. When the ball is flung out, and this compact body is again broken up, a few staggering figures, covered with blood, emerge from the mass, and straggling blindly about for a moment or two, fall to the ground. The vanquished are trampled down without mercy, and the desperate game is continued over their bodies; the number of players diminishing with each renewal of the sanguinary encounter, until the remaining combatants are reduced to a few, who glare upon each other face to face half-dead with fatigue and loss of blood. He who has strength enough left for a last effort, now seizes the ball, and endeavours to escape with it, feebly pursued by his exhausted opponents. At length the border of the commune is reached, and the prize is won. It is at this point of the game that the greatest danger usually arises, and it

* Les Derniers Bretons.

is here that hoarded vengeance, if it have survived the fearful collisions of the day, calculates upon its final triumph. M. Souvestre supplies us with an illustration of the horrors which sometimes close the day of the *soule*, in the instance of a peasant of Pontivy, who had acquired such celebrity for his skill in this game that he was popularly called the *souleur*, and used to display the prizes he had gained, suspended and ranged on his mantelpiece, with as much pride as an Indian feels in decorating his wigwam with the scalps he has taken in battle. Every year François hung up a new trophy over his fire-place. Only one man, Ivon Marker, ventured to dispute the victory, year after year, with François, but in an encounter which took place between them in 1810, Ivon received so severe a beating from his powerful opponent that he died of his hurts. Pierre Marker succeeded to the pretensions of his father, without being more fortunate. On one occasion, struggling with François, Pierre lost an eye, scooped out of his head according to the revolting custom of the French, and on another two of his teeth were smashed and driven down his throat. For these injuries and humiliations, Pierre Marker swore to revenge himself upon the victorious François.

The opportunity for vengeance occurred at a *soule* which was attended by François and his rival. There was nothing remarkable in their bearing towards each other at first, except that Pierre avoided François throughout the *mêlée*, although the latter encouraged him to approach by several gracious invitations, such as "Come here, *chouan*, that I may knock your other eye out!" Pierre was insensible to the compliment, and continued to keep aloof. Once,

towards the end of the day, François, having been thrown down, felt two *sabots* crushing his stomach, and, looking up, saw the empty socket of an eye glaring upon him with a frightful expression, but by a powerful effort, and the help of friends, he regained his feet.

Night was beginning to fall. The greater number of the *souleurs*, worn out by their exertions, had dropped off, and were slowly dispersing homewards; a few, more vigorous and furious than the rest, still remained to dispute the prize. François seized the favourable moment, snatched up the *soule*, and flew across the country. For a short time his opponents followed him; but he rapidly gained ground, and at last lost sight of them. Their distant cries became fainter and fainter through the gathering fogs of the evening, then ceased altogether. The *souleurs* believed that the prize was won, and gave up the contention.

François, covered with bruises, flung himself upon the ground to take breath, then renewing his flight, began to run in the direction of a little stream, which formed the boundary of the commune, and, consequently, the goal of victory. He saw the willows on its banks plainly before him—his heart beat high—a few efforts more would carry him to the opposite side—when he heard behind him the light and peculiar sound which is made by the naked feet of a swift runner, and, turning round, he saw, through the increasing gloom, the shadow of a man coming rapidly towards him. Then, for the first time, the old *souleur* was conscious of a sensation of dread, for he felt that he was too much exhausted to defend himself, and that he was beyond the reach of help. He determined to press on,

and gathering all the strength he could summon, he rushed onwards and onwards towards the river; but the sound of the pursuing feet came nearer and nearer, and François heard the voice of his adversary uttering a hoarse malediction. He strains forward, reaches the bank, clutches a willow, his feet are already in the water—at that moment a loud cry rings in his ears, and he recognises the voice of Pierre Marker. François could cross the stream at a bound, were he fresh as he had come out that morning, but he is broken down by fatigue, and in his attempt to dash over he stumbles and falls heavily on the sharp stones that form the bed of the river. Endeavouring to recover himself, he feels a knee upon his breast, and sees the figure of Pierre spread over him with his eyeless socket, and dilapidated mouth, lighted up with a ghastly laugh. François instinctively stretches out his hand towards the opposite bank of the river—if he touches it he is saved! But Pierre seizes his arm with a grasp of iron:

"Thou art yet in our commune, *bourgeois*," he exclaims; "I have a right upon thee."

"Leave me, *chouan*," replies François.

"Give me the *soule*," demands Pierre.

"Take it—leave me."

"You owe me something yet."

"What is it?"

"Thine eye!" shouted Pierre; "thine eye!" and in uttering these words he closed his brawny hand, and striking the left eye of his victim, it sprang out of its socket!

"Leave me, leave me, assassin!" cried the unfortunate François.

"You still owe me your teeth, *bourgeois*," returned the other, and his teeth were broken into his throat with a blow. Then in a delirium of frenzy, he seized the head of François under his left arm, and proceeded to hammer his skull with a *sabot*. The next morning the corpse of François was discovered on the bank of the river. Pierre was cited for the murder before the court of assize; but he pleaded that the encounter had taken place within the commune where the play had commenced, and on that plea he was acquitted.

Such is the horrible story related by M. Souvestre. When *soule* used to be a popular amusement, incidents of this revolting description were of frequent occurrence; but, happily, the game which fostered their criminal passions is now rarely revived. It has gone out with the gradual extinction of the seignorial rights, its chief supporters being almost everywhere the seigneurs or lords of the manors or parishes.

ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY BOMBAY BRANCH

XXVII.

NANTES.

THE moment an Englishman enters Nantes he thinks of the Revocation of its Edict—as the notorious penal law against Protestantism is loosely and erroneously called.

It seems to rise up on all sides, and colour the very atmosphere. You fancy you see it written in flaming

characters on the red flags of the shipping, that you hear it wailing through sinister passages and blind old doorways, and shrieking aloud in the uproar of drums, trumpets, processions, the riot of mariners, and tramp of soldiers which stun you as you advance into the city. The Revocation of the Edict is as inseparably associated with the name of Nantes, as the firing of the temple with the name of Ephesus. They will go down to the end of time together. Nantes, famous for many events of a startling kind which stand out conspicuously in its history, is more famous for that single fact than for all the rest.

From the earliest period Nantes has been doomed to the miseries of war and bloodshed. There is scarcely an old house or street which has not, at one time or another, been the scene of some terrible tragedy. It has suffered every possible calamity that can be inflicted upon a town; and during the last nine hundred years, with few intervals of repose, has passed through the diversified experiences of being stormed, taken and retaken, fortified and demolished, blown up, inundated, sacked, plundered, put to the sword, and burned to cinders. How it grew up into its present magnificence and expansion through these destructive varieties of fortune is a marvel to contemplate. Huns, Gauls, English, Normans, Vendeans, and even Bretons themselves, have appeared in endless succession before its gates, destroying, pillaging, and slaughtering; yet, memorable as these circumstances are, and wonderful as you feel them to be in their historical continuity and accumulation, the fact that first seizes upon your English imagination is the Revocation of the Edict. It casts all other horrors into the shade. Even Carrier, the great

Ogre of Nantes, pales his ineffectual fires before the *battues* of religious extermination. The French themselves, loth as they may be in this age to acknowledge it, cannot help regarding that sublime act of intolerance as the distinguishing incident which will cling to Nantes for ever. They have good reason, too, for remembering the bigotry of the seventeenth century, which, besides the disgrace it brought upon the town, nearly annihilated its trade.

Everything in Nantes is on a grand scale. It is a very large city, with upwards of ninety thousand inhabitants. It has vast quays, and a vast number of bridges, which the guide-books assure you are all built of stone, although some of them are of honest carpentry; vast houses, fit dwelling-places for Titans, six or seven lofty stories being here nothing at all remarkable; enormous oxen; huge boats piled to the skies with hay; great fishing-smacks, with nets covering half the breadth of the river; broad streets, broad squares, and broad coaches. The coffee-cups are larger than usual, the shops are larger, the wagons are steeper, and heaped up to a more perilous height than elsewhere; even the fashions are bigger in bonnets, coats, caps, hats, and pantaloons, which last article of dress is ingeniously puckered round the waist, to ensure the largest possible consumption of cloth in the smallest possible space. The height of the houses, the spaciousness of the streets, the general aspect of towering warehouses, sparred over with masts and cranes; the flowing waters, formed by a confluence of rivers at this point, covered with great bath-houses, and laundries, and boats and ships, of every shape, colour and size, and

broken up into numerous arms by populous islands, incorporated with the city by bridges (amongst them a suspension-bridge), and the perpetual din and bustle, and crowding of people, satisfy you at once that you are in the midst of a great city.

Memorials of the barbarities of the Revolution, which you are willing enough to forget, meet you at every step. The handsome house of the fiend Carrier, at the end of a

pretty avenue of trees, is one of the first sights to which the *valet de place* considers it indispensable to conduct you. This splendid mansion, with an enormous fortune, amassed by plunder, was bequeathed by Carrier to his

mistress, who used to preside at his sanguinary orgies. But the lady had been too long accustomed to a career of iniquity to enjoy her wealth peacefully, and towards the close of her life was sentenced to two years' hard labour for some violation of the laws. You are next shown a place which used to be deluged with blood by the guillotine, and which is now converted into a market. You pass from these sights with loathing; yet even the broad airy quays, and the pleasant green waters of the Loire afford you no relief, for here were enacted the horrors of the Noyades; and there are some buildings still standing on the quays where hundreds of royalists were shut up, and selections made from them every night, when they were tied together in pairs, back to back, and cast into the river. This mode of death transcends all the inventions of antiquity; it is even worse than the Noyades, which originated with Nero. During the fearful struggle in the water of the miserable victims, one of them must have been uppermost, gasping and alive, while the other was drowning below! Let us turn to other subjects.

The Cathedral of St. Peter is the most remarkable edifice in Nantes. According to the current tradition, it was erected on the ruins of an ancient temple, but there is no evidence whatever of such antiquity in the structure itself, with the exception of a little chapel under a range of arcades stretching off from the choir, looking very like a Roman relique. Of the rest, there is scarcely a fragment which can be referred to a period anterior to the eleventh century. That a cathedral stood here in the ninth century is probably true; but, considering that the Normans gave up the city to fire and pillage towards

the close of that century, it is unlikely that a particle of the original building escaped. All trustworthy authorities agree in the difficulty of fixing the precise time when the present cathedral was erected. There are scraps here and there of different ages, the earliest being the eleventh or twelfth, and the latest the fifteenth, with sundry patches of restoration of still later dates.

The façade is grand and rich, presenting, however, an extraordinary anomaly between the weight and solidity of the upper walls, and the delicacy and lightness of the ornaments of the lower part, which forms their base. The doors are crusted over with a prodigious number of little bas-reliefs, which, examined in detail, are full of interest

from the variety of the compositions and the exquisite finish of the workmanship, but which the spectator confesses with reluctance to have rather a mean aspect in the *ensemble*. Passing into the church, all minor criticism is absorbed in the severe beauty and imposing majesty of the immense nave. In height, size, and the grandeur of its proportions, this interior surpasses most other cathedrals. The play of light and shadow through its arcades produces the most charming pictorial effects, and the gallery which runs round the whole is remarkable for the marvellous art with which it combines a rich profusion of embellishments, with a strict simplicity in the general design. Whether this gallery is looked at from below, and regarded as part of a great whole, or closely inspected from above, in reference to the taste and skill displayed in the choice and execution of its ornaments, it is equally an object of wonder and admiration.

In the south transept is the tomb of Francis II., the last duke of Brittany, and his wife Marguerite de Foix. This beautiful piece of sculpture is justly esteemed as one of the noblest monuments of the *Renaissance*. The features live and speak in the marble instinct with vital expression, and the mastery of the artist is shown throughout the whole articulation of the limbs, especially in the treatment of the hands. Amongst the groups clustered in niches upon the tomb, the statuette of Charlemagne is particularly deserving attention. The head, face, figure, attitude, and general expression, possess the individuality of a portrait reconciled with the universal truth of the highest art. In addition to numerous groups representing the Twelve Apostles, and sundry saints of Church and State,

there are four grand allegorical figures emblematical of Strength strangling a dragon, Prudence with a curb and lantern, Justice with the scales, and Wisdom, an old man with a looking-glass and compass, and a serpent at his feet. These statues exhibit a rare union of power and simplicity; the draperies are graceful and flowing, and the character of each is distinct and well preserved. This great work was executed in 1507 by Michel Colomb, of whose life, and other works, nothing whatever is known, except that he was born in an obscure place called Saint Pol-de-Léon!

Almost all the remaining churches of Nantes are modern; that of St. Francis is curious on account of its circular form, so uncommon in Catholic countries. It stands in a sequestered quarter of the town, and might be passed unnoticed from the stillness of the place, and its unpromising exterior. But it is worth peeping into. The figure of the saint, of the size of life, is inserted in a deep niche high above the back of the altar, and the light is ingeniously let in upon it from an unseen window, so that his saintship stands, by a mechanical miracle, in a flood of sunshine, while the rest of the church is buried in deep twilight. This is one of the devices which, taking the visitor by surprise, have acquired for the temples of Catholicism such a reputation for theatrical effect. There are two great plaster of Paris casts, probably the productions of some of the itinerant Italians, sprawling up the sides of this rotunda, one of which represents the eternal Mont Calvary. They are not badly executed, but essentially vulgar, a vice which is grievously enhanced by their intrusion into this quiet little building.

Such slight fragments of the early churches as escaped the devastations of Carrier and the Revolution, are not worth the toil of piercing the horrid cavernous streets in which they are smothered and built over. In the depths of the city are many queer tottering houses of the middle ages, recognised at once by their façades, sculptured for the most part in wood, and embellished with corbels. Some of these houses (now rapidly disappearing) are so close together that the roofs nearly touch each other, while the passage below will admit of only two persons abreast. Art loses something in the loss of countless bits of curious sculpture, swept away in the removal of these dingy mansions, but the city gains salubrity by the clearance of such pestilential quarters. In Nantes—the city of destruction, the city of fires and conspiracies, of incendiarism, atheism and bigotry, of civil war and foreign incursions, the city of transitions and revolutions—the remains of the architecture and Christianity of the Early Ages are less numerous and interesting than in any other of the Breton cities. They have been nearly all destroyed, and the little that yet survives is embedded amongst the meanest habitations in the worst parts of the town. Modern improvements, and the irresistible progress of necessity have, bit by bit, obliterated her ecclesiastical and artistical glories.

The archives of the prefecture possess the richest collection of documents, illustrative of local history, in Brittany: the whole of the original papers relative to the war in La Vendée, charters, records, and curious MSS.; amongst others, the full minutes of the trial of Gilles de Retz, better known to the world as Barbe-Bleue. This celebrated person committed every crime which a drunken

and delirious imagination can conceive; and, coming into an enormous fortune at an early age, devoted his wealth to the gratification of a monstrous lust of blood and debauchery, intelligible only on the assumption that the unfortunate man was insane. In addition to the catalogue of enormities proved against him, he was accused of magic, and it appears from the record of the proceedings that this charge weighed heaviest of all in the minds of his judges. He was sentenced to be burned alive in the meadow of Biesse; but his friends were powerful enough to get permission to strangle him beforehand, and to spare him, who had inflicted such horrible agonies upon others, the pangs of a lingering death. A stone cross marks the spot where his body was given to the flames. Close to one of the bridges there is a little stone building which is said to have been erected at his desire, and which is called the expiatory monument of Blue Beard.

The veritable Barbe-Bleue enacted the horrors rendered so familiar by the popular legend, and the drama of Perault, in the castle of Champtocé, in the neighbouring province of Anjou, where the ruins of the extensive pile may yet be seen on a lofty table-land close to the village. The honour of having produced the real monster is also claimed by Brittany, in the person of a wicked nobleman, called Comorre, Count of Cournailles, who lived in the sixth century, some eight hundred years before Gilles de Retz.

But Comorre was an insignificant villain in comparison, and hardly worthy of being allowed to mix in the train of that mysterious personage, whose sanguinary orgies still supply shuddering materials for story-books and melo-drames.

Anne of Brittany, the poet René le Pays, Cailliaud the traveller, Laënec the physician, are the principal celebrities to whom Nantes has given birth. The catalogue is meagre, and it is satisfactory to be able to strengthen it by the addition of a name of which the living generation, at least, is abundantly proud. This new lion is M. Baudry, an inhabitant of the town, to whom is ascribed the distinction of having been the inventor of the vehicle called the Omnibus. It seems that the first omnibus that ever ran was established here in the year 1826, that the machine was afterwards introduced into Paris, then into London, and at last into all parts of the world where the streaming populations were in want of a "cast" *en route*. Whether M. Baudry is really entitled to the gratitude of mankind for this discovery, may probably be contested in ages yet to come; but there is no doubt that it is claimed for him by his townspeople, who, in course of time, may be expected to authenticate his fame by the erection of a statue to his memory.

XXVIII.

THE DUCHESS DE BERRI.

EXACTLY opposite to the *château*, the birth-place of the Duchess Anne, and the scene of her nuptials with Louis XII., and now the prison of Nantes, in a lanky house in the Rue de Château, is the room containing the stove behind which the Duchess de Berri hid herself with three of her friends, while the *gendarmes* were roasting her outside. This room will doubtless, by and by, become an object of as much morbid interest to occasional travellers, as the dismal mansion of M. Lafarge, or the court-house of Tulle.

However poorly we may think of the heroics of the Duchess in affairs of State, we cannot refuse to acknowledge that she exhibited an extraordinary spirit of endurance during the seventeen hours she was confined in this narrow space, without food or drink, in an upright posture, so cramped in room as to be unable to stir hand or foot, and suffering inconceivable agony from the heat. The transaction is certainly not exempt from a mixture of the ridiculous, considering the hopelessness of her claims upon the throne, and the melodramatic extravagance and strange want of dignity she displayed throughout her proceedings. But it is impossible to contemplate the

excruciating torture she underwent on this occasion, without feeling some sympathy for her sufferings, notwithstanding that she threw herself in the way of them with a recklessness which will sadly interfere with her historical reputation.

The open fire-place, behind which she was incarcerated, is built in the corner of an extremely small tiled room at the top of the house, the *cachette* forming the angle at the back, and being, as may be supposed, of very limited dimensions. Whether the recess was left there by design or accident is not known; but it was probably intended for some such use as that to which it was thus applied. It is scarcely wide enough for a man to stand up in with any degree of ease, and the access to it through a low iron plate, resembling the door of an oven, is so difficult as to seem impassable even for a child. How any man of the ordinary height and size could have squeezed himself through can be understood only by a very full appreciation of the perils of the moment. Yet into this *cachette* the Duchess de Berri, accompanied by her friends, contrived to force a passage. When the whole party had succeeded in securing their retreat, and getting themselves shut in by some friendly hand, it is quite certain that, once having taken up their positions, they could not alter them, whatever pain or inconvenience they may have undergone. The interior is sufficiently lofty, narrowing as it ascends, and two or three bricks broken out by the prisoners immediately under the tiles, sufficed to give them air, when the smoke from the chimney, rolling down in gusty volumes, threatened to suffocate them. Had it not been for the heat, which at last scorched their dresses

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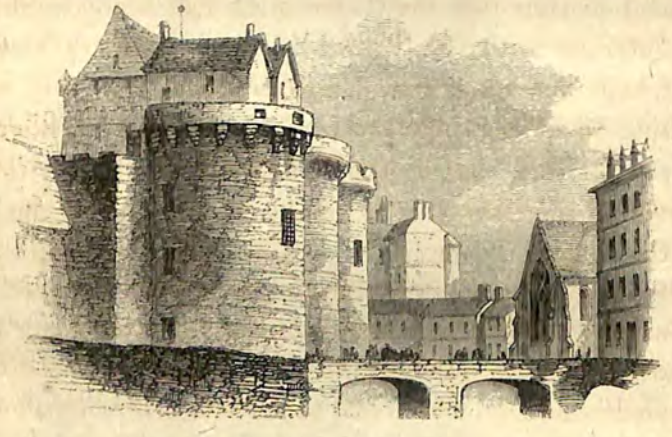
almost to flames, they might have exhausted the patience of the *gendarmes*, or, at all events, have remained long enough to enable their friends to contrive some escape for them over the roofs of the adjoining houses, which, from the position of the garret, might have been easily accomplished.

The poor Duchess, however, blackened and blistered all over, was unable to hold out, and, as all the world knows, kicked at the iron-door till she was liberated from her hiding-place, and seized by the soldiers. She was imme-



diately conveyed, without noise or parade, just as she was, across the street into the château, where she was lodged for the night, and then sent off the next morning to securer quarters.

What infatuation tempted her to take up her residence opposite to the prison nobody can tell. It was the tendency of her inexplicable genius always to run her head into danger. There were a hundred places in Nantes where she might have been safe; but she selected this

in preference to them all. It almost faces the little bridge leading to the principal gate of the château, and she could not approach the windows without being seen by the soldiers on guard at the bridge, and by the people on the ramparts and within the fort. In short, it was the most dangerous spot in the town. But even the choice of this unsafe location was not her only indiscretion. She actually remained here for four months, and had become so confident from continued impunity, that she occasionally ventured into the streets. It was well known in official quarters that the Government had really no desire to interfere with this little mad-cap heroine, so long as she kept her hands out of mischief, and that they were willing to let her play out her hide-and-seek pantomime in pursuit of a Crown, provided she did not openly throw herself in their way. This might have lasted to the end of the chapter, if she had been a little more prudent; but there came a change in the Préfecture, which destroyed her delusions. The former préfect of the department was well aware of the disposition of the Government, and, whatever suspicions he might have had concerning her whereabouts, there is *now* sufficient reason to believe that he gave himself no further trouble in the matter. The Duchess, therefore, was safe—security made her careless; and when the préfect was changed, her carelessness exposed her at once to the fate which she soon afterwards suffered. The new official was a man of a severe and inflexible temper, who took his instructions *au pied de la lettre,* and fulfilled them sternly. It was impossible for the Duchess to escape him; and she accordingly fell into his hands in the simplest way imaginable.

She used to dine with the ladies of the family—Mesdemoiselles de Junis—in a room on the first-floor, looking upon the street. The dinner was regularly served by a neighbouring *traiteur*, who, bringing in his dishes as usual one day, observed a vacant chair at the table. The public mind at that time was in a state of some excitement, and this trifling circumstance exciting the fellow's suspicions, he immediately apprised the authorities, and the house was instantly in the hands of the military, who occupied every room, and left no means of exit or entrance unguarded.

The apartment where the Duchess used to dine is a front room, floored with plain tiles, without carpet or rug, and having no other furniture than an oval oak table in the centre, and a few neat rush-bottomed chairs. The Duchess, who had been *fêted* on the Seine, and had once been "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes" in Paris, had now been accustomed to put up with any accommodation she could get. A short time before she took refuge with Mademoiselle de Junis, she had found shelter in a château in the country belonging to a family of devoted Royalists; but, the police beginning to betray increased vigilance, and various rumours being in circulation about her, the family became alarmed and requested her to withdraw. It is not at all unlikely that her own hair-brained volatility confirmed them in their resolution, if it did not produce it. Having no alternative, she left the château, and when her adventures come to be truly represented on the boards of the Vaudeville or the Palais Royal, she will be exhibited issuing from the château without shoes or stockings, disguised as a milk-maid, with a pail on her head, trolling one of the popular ditties of La Vendée! Such was, in

fact, the manner of her departure, and the *ruse* was entirely successful; for, in this disguise, supported with the ability of an accomplished actress, she was able to cross the country in safety and join her friends at an appointed rendezvous.

The house of Mademoiselle de Junis was scarcely inhabited when I visited Nantes, and had a singularly sad and doleful aspect. There were people living in it, but not of the same rank as its former occupants. It is a mere citizen's house, substantial and plain, without a single attempt at embellishment. You pass up two pair of stairs, and when you arrive at the second landing the staircase seems to terminate, but there is yet another which you reach through a small door, and which you scale with some difficulty on account of its narrowness. It was up this dark and inconvenient staircase the Duchess fled to conceal herself on the approach of the *gendarmes;* and many a night must she have trodden it with palpitation, when, at every sound of alarm, and every new rumour that reached the little party, she felt it necessary to fly to her hiding-place.

The most melancholy part of the story is that which relates to the faithful Mademoiselle de Junis. She was a devoted friend of the Duchess, and kept her safely in her house. For this offence, she was committed to the château, from whence she was not liberated until she had expiated her fidelity by many years of confinement.

XXIX.

THE WAR OF LA VENDÉE.—ANGERS.

We are now in the heart of the country which was the scene of the war of La Vendée. This great, green river, the Loire, runs through the centre of the battle-fields, and as we sail up from Nantes to Saumur, we touch every hour upon a spot famous for some incident of heroism or devotion. Of all modern wars the war of La Vendée was the most sanguinary and the most romantic. The conjunction is startling, but easily accounted for. The peculiar nature of the country gave a picturesque character to the struggle, which takes it quite out of the range of ordinary campaigns, while the constant presence of women, including those of the highest rank, in the midst of the conflict, under the banners which they had themselves embroidered, and beneath which multitudes of them fell, inspires this memorable episode of the Revolution with the interest of a chivalric romance.

One day's sail up the river gives a clearer insight into the actual details of the war than a library of memoirs and histories. It enables you to understand at a glance how operations were effected, which are not always intelligible unless you have the scenery before you. The clustering of the population at certain points, the sudden evasions,

the night-flights and scattering of large masses, the conveyance of fugitives across the river, and the despatch of scouts and agents through obscure tracks in the midst of the enemy's posts, are incidents which acquire a special interest from a knowledge of the surface of the country. To be enabled to appreciate them fully, it is necessary to penetrate the interior; but even the banks of the river, which you have plenty of leisure to contemplate from the deck of a lazy steamer, will furnish you with abundant suggestions, out of which imagination can sketch its own pictures of skirmishes, ambuscades, and villages on fire.

Between Nantes and Angers, a sail of some ten hours or so, you pass many localities inscribed with Revolutionary memories. It was at St. Florent, for instance, that the rebellion broke out, originating in a circumstance which bears a close resemblance to the first collision of William Tell with the authorities. Commissioners from the Revolutionary Government were sent down to ballot for a forced levy or conscription, and being somewhat ungraciously received by the people, who were averse to the proceeding, they rashly fired a gun amongst the crowd. This was the signal for the

outburst of popular frenzy. The gun was seized, the commissioners were beaten, hunted away, and their papers impounded and burned, and the night was spent by the peasantry in singing and revelling over their victory. It was the first act of open resistance to a government whose severities against the priesthood had already brought them into odium in this neighbourhood. The news of the riot reached the ears of an old man, a dealer in wool, whose name was Cathelineau. He was a person of weight and influence in his locality,—a man of sense, patriotism, and energy. He instantly left his work, washed himself, put on his coat, and, hastening to the market-place, harangued the excited multitude. There is never wanting on such occasions a man of strong convictions, whose power lies dormant till it is thus awakened, to rouse the masses into revolt: the crisis is sure to find its man to give impulse and direction to the first movement, although he is seldom adequate to the guidance of subsequent events, and is generally sacrificed in their progress. Cathelineau found the spirit of rebellion prepared and eager to respond to his call. Facilities were ready to his hands, which imparted unparalleled suddenness and decision to the general action. The whole population had been outraged on the tenderest point in the degradation of their pastors; the life of the peasantry had always been bound up with that of their lords, who, unlike the rest of the French aristocracy, resided on their estates, and mixed freely in the amusements and occupations of their tenantry; the château and the hut had a common interest in the preservation of the existing order of things; and a sentiment of attachment to royalty and

hereditary privileges was a tradition woven into the faith and habits of the people. Here were inflammable materials which a single spark was sufficient to explode. The spark was supplied by Cathelineau. His infuriated audience hardly heard him to a close, and crowding round him, followed him out of the market-place to the nearest military station, where they captured ammunition, dispersed the soldiers, and opened the war of retribution. From that moment it spread; with various fluctuations, like the rushing fire of a prairie, until at last it reached the profound solitude of Clisson, where, for the first time, it disturbed the serene heart of the most celebrated historian of these events, Madame de la Rochejaquelin, who had not yet forsaken her maiden name of Lescure. It was here also, at St. Florent, that one of the most mournful scenes of the war took place, in the passage across the river of nearly a hundred thousand people driven from their homesteads by the victorious Republicans, whose lines, in the pursuit, were everywhere marked by the flames of towns and villages. Bishops, priests, old ladies, children, women of all conditions, from baronesses and countesses to vine-dressers and lace-makers, huddled together with teams of oxen, baggage-waggons, lumbering caravans, and tattered colours, all hurried to this spot to effect their escape to the opposite bank of the river, which they accomplished, for the most part, only to die on the roadside of fatigue and famine, or to perish in flying fights or on the disastrous field of Mans.

Ancenis, on the opposite shore, witnessed afterwards the ineffectual attempt of the remnant of the Vendean army to recross to the southern side; and as we advance up the

river, reminiscences of a similar kind continually arrest our attention.

The wild character of the interior enabled the Vendeans to harass the Republicans over a period of time almost incredible, in reference to the inferiority of their means and numbers. La Vendée and the neighbouring country, irregular on the surface, may be described for the most part as a wilderness of woods and orchards: hence the name of Le Bocage, which applies to the central district, as that nearest to the sea is called Le Marais, on account of the swamps and dreary wastes with which it is covered, impracticable in winter, and difficult for the passage of armies in all seasons. Both districts were equally favourable to the feints and stratagems of the Vendeans; the interior particularly, where it was impossible to follow them, and where their knowledge of the woody labyrinths enabled them successfully to deceive the enemy, entrap them in detail, and escape at pleasure. The country is laid out in small enclosures, bounded by high hedges, and intersected by innumerable deep lanes and pathways, presenting tortuous tracks which run in and out of each other like the lines of a maze, so that even the inhabitants, most familiar with the topography, are frequently bewildered in the choice of their *route*. Throughout the whole of this department there were but two high roads, and these were carefully avoided by the Royalists. They kept to their woods and defiles, appearing in the morning at one place, and in the evening at another many leagues distant by the regular road, but which they were enabled to reach with celerity by passes with which the enemy were unacquainted. The Republican generals complained

bitterly to the Convention of the difficulties they had in getting at their fugitive opponents. It was like fighting Will-o'-the-Wisp. When they thought that the Vendeans were in advance of them, they suddenly found them hanging on their rear. Their outposts were destroyed by unseen hands; their picquets were shot down by invisible assailants; it was impossible to bring the Vendeans to a pitched battle; there were hardly any open spaces to spread out their troops in for an engagement; they were buried amongst trees, and could hardly see fifty yards around them in any direction; whenever they attempted a movement on a grand scale it turned out a sheer loss of time and tactics; and the Royalists, after decoying them into some such demonstration, would vanish into the woods, where they rapidly dispersed through dark defiles and entangled recesses, into which it was utterly useless to pursue them. The Republicans might as well have drawn up in solid array against the birds that sported in the depths of the forest. No country ever presented more remarkable agencies for defensive hostilities. Even the salt marshes and canals of the district called Les Sables were peculiarly available to them in their mode of warfare. The raised pathways which intersect the surface formed a species of fortification important to them, but of no avail to regular troops; and the canals, which the Vendeans easily sprang over by the help of their leaping poles, offered the most vexatious obstacles to the Republican soldiers. Wherever the canal was too broad to be taken at a spring, the peasant shot himself across in a light boat with a rapidity which enabled him effectually to evade pursuit, and, rising on the opposite bank, he discharged

his gun with fatal certainty (for these Vendeans were famous marksmen), and suddenly disappeared.

The view of the country obtained from the shores of the Loire is characteristic of these diversified features. Magnificent from its full, clear volume and magnitude, the river acquires additional beauty from the numerous wooded islands, which create such variety on its waters. It runs through districts generally very flat, but richly interspersed with hills, rocks, woods and towns. The most picturesque part of the Loire is from Nantes to Saumur; beyond that point it assumes a monotonous aspect, which would be intolerable but for the pretty islands, hanging woods and flying villages, which incidentally relieve the long succession of fields, hedgerows and sandbanks. The Loire is subject to two extremes—floods and droughts. It is difficult to believe that the thread of water, which, in the very hot season, drowsily ripples down the parched bed of the stream could be swollen into the fearful torrents which sometimes rise in the winter, inundating the fields, woods, and villages for many miles round.

The approach to Angers, up the Mayenne, makes an agreeable contrast to the more expanded scenery of the Loire. Passing through dark cliffs (if they may be so described) of slate, you emerge into open pasturages, through which the river flows, varied by occasional apparitions of schist appearing above the surface of the soil in a variety of forms. The town, surrounded by massive walls, erected early in the thirteenth century, by King John of England, is built on the side of a sharp hill, extending over a bridge to the opposite shore, where its increasing population finds house-room in a suburb called

the Doutre, a corruption of *de l'autre,* by which is plainly meant to be indicated the *other side* of the river. The position of the place is distinctly marked out from a considerable distance by the ruins of the old castle and the lofty spires of the cathedral, which is built on the pinnacle of the rock, in the heart of the oldest part of the town. The deep colour of the slate formation breaking out here and there down the sides, gives a sombre and remarkable effect to the whole mass of buildings. In the dark, narrow and steep streets, rendered peculiarly disagreeable by the slate or coal-dust ashes with which they abound, we have unmistakable evidences of the mediæval origin of the town. Some of the meanest houses, which have escaped the ventilating agencies of modern times, are clustered over with sculptures illustrative of the costume and customs of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The details are well worth examination, especially the richly-decorated façade of a house which occupies the angle of the street behind the cathedral, and the house called the *Hôtel des Marchands,* in Rue Baudrière.

The cathedral is the principal object of attraction. Its outline is extremely imposing as you sail up the river; but the charm vanishes the moment you have scaled the streets and stand in front of the entrance. The want of harmony between the original design and the additions which have been subsequently made to it, strike the eye at once. Having only a nave, without aisles, the narrowness of the building becomes conspicuously preposterous from the great height of the spires which have been raised on the top of the screen. A single window, stained all

over with gaudy colours, a single door squeezed up amongst heavy statues, and pressed down by superincumbent niches, filled with colossal figures of St. Maurice and other pious celebrities, and a high dead wall lowering above, are the prominent features of the great west front. The disproportion of the breadth to the height is enhanced by a gallery which runs between the spires, so as to shut out the play of the light as much as possible, and to give to the whole as blank, sullen, and spectral an appearance as an antagonist taste, endeavouring to spoil the abrupt and weighty style of the middle ages, could accomplish by the exercise of the utmost ingenuity. It is only in the interior you get the true character of the building, and understand the intentions of the founders. Here everything is simple, plain, and massive; a dim old church, looking as gloomy as a prison, with gorgeously painted windows, through which the "religious light" streams softly in, richly flooding the dismal interior, like the grace of heaven falling upon the despairing soul of a sinner.

Although this interior disappoints the tourist at the first glance, it affords a great relief to the gaudy churches he sometimes falls in with, in which door, windows, walls, and niches are choked up with incongruous ornaments, exhibiting a distracting profusion of embellishments heaped together without any intelligible design, and apparently the work of artists of different ages. Inside and outside of these churches the spirit of lavish decoration appears to have exhausted its invention in columns and statues and fantastic foliage, and heads of angels and flying figures buried in fruit and flowers. The execution of

these marvellous varieties is generally remarkable for so much beauty and delicacy as to excite surprise at the union of such artistical feeling and execrable taste. But the artists are less to blame in these cases, than the church in whose service they were employed. Prodigality, without judgment, may with more justice be referred to the rich establishment which desired to strike the senses of its communicants through the outward signs of its power, than to the poor sculptors who subsisted by administering to its display.

The ruined château is the most interesting relique of old Angers. It was formerly the residence of the Dukes of Anjou, and stands on a high rock, washed by the

waters of the river. It had originally eighteen towers built of rough black schist, clasped with rings of tufa, procured from the neighbouring quarries of Tufeaux. The crowns of the towers have mouldered away, and they are nearly all reduced to a level with the ramparts; but the fragments that remain are remarkably picturesque. The white lines of tufa cutting into the dark schist, have a singular effect amongst the broken walls and battlements. The château is now converted into a prison and powder magazine.

With the exception of the château and the cathedral, there is not much to see in Angers. There are several churches and a museum—*fac-similes* of churches and museums already explored; and a little column at the extremity of the street of the Faubourg Saint-Laud, with a terrible story attached to it; but curiosity is easily appeased in these matters. Having run over the sights, there was no great temptation to remain here, and a four hours' drive in the twilight, through a charming country, carried us to Saumur.

XXX.

THE PARADISE OF THE DEMI-FORTUNE.

SWEEPING over the handsome stone bridge, with which Napoleon, on his return from Italy, displaced the old wooden one that used to span the Loire at this point, we drew up at ten o'clock at night at the Hotel Belvedère, on the quay of Saumur. This is the best hotel in the town, and one of the most expensive in France. The house is well kept, perfectly clean and thoroughly aired and ventilated; the apartments are furnished with splendour, and all the accommodations and arrangements are in the best style; but the charges are extravagant. The people, however, are never wearied of attending to your comforts, and doing all sorts of obliging things to put you at your ease, and the *maître d'hôtel* is an artist in glass, which he blows into cupolas and arm-chairs, and necklaces, for his own amusement, graciously throwing open his museum to his guests, and one must pay something for the accomplishments of one's host.

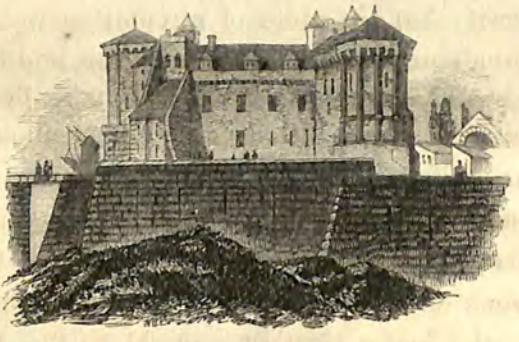
There are three principal hotels in Saumur. L'Ecu de Bretagne is the oldest, and the worst. It stands in the centre of the grand street, forming the point of an angle where one of the ancient streets runs off into the midst of the town. This crumbling establishment is little better

than an *auberge*. The rooms are low, dingy, and in every point of view incommodious, and the house suffers under the further disadvantage of receiving some of the diligences, which keep it in a constant state of uproar and filth. The Hôtel de Londres, in the same street, is a building of such enormous magnitude that, considering the scantiness of the travelling population in this part of the world, it may be fairly doubted whether its chambers were ever yet filled. Why this vast edifice was dedicated to the purposes of an hotel, and why, above all places on the face of the globe, it was called after London, passes one's ingenuity to conjecture. The arrangements of the interior being on a scale of such superfluous magnitude, and its owners having in due course of time discovered the uselessness of their space, the house has unavoidably acquired a triste and paradoxical aspect. Sauntering through the empty chambers and silent passages, you feel, at one and the same moment, as if you were in an hotel and as if you were not in an hotel. There are, on the one hand, suites of rooms with numbers on the doors, and keys, and bells to no end; staircases and corridors, traversed by sundry sleepy *garçons* and *filles des chambres*, who tramp up and down, and in and out, apparently at predestined times; large court-yards, in one of which you may see a dusty travelling-carriage, and perhaps a stray servant in a foreign livery, looking as if he did not know whether he should stay or go; a large apartment, with "*Salle à Manger*" inscribed upon it, traversed by a long table, and margined by rows of chairs; a bureau, with a woman in it, looking as glassy and fixed as a wax figure, a few keys hung on a board over her head, an ink-stand before her, with a pen

or two stuck transversely in it, and no further signs of life save a cat coiled up on a mat at her feet; a smart young man, very pallid, with his hair soaped backwards, a small growth of moustache on his upper lip, a black tuft under his chin, and no whiskers, a pea-green silk neck-handkerchief, lying as close to his neck as a sunbeam, a white shirt with emerald studs, a plaid waistcoat of divers colours, crimson predominating, a brown calico coat, fitting tightly and scantily, and black trowsers, his jaunty mien and a certain *tournure* of style, very easily understood, but very difficult to describe, proclaiming him to be the head-waiter: all these items are strongly symptomatic of an hotel. But, on the other hand, the *salle* is empty; there is scarcely a sound to be heard, except a shrill cry from the *cuisine* for somebody who has gone fast asleep at the top of the house, thinking they would not be wanted below, or a guttural, gurgling *sacre!* from the court-yards; then, when you ring you must wait patiently, and, after you have held communication with the pallid young man, you must wait still more patiently till he has communicated with the executive department, to whose care the achievement of your desires is to be confided; so that with the slenderness of the actual evidences, and the inexplicable extent and apparent desertion of the building, you can hardly persuade yourself that it is an hotel, after all—in spite of the ceremonials, without substance, which indicate its theoretical uses. From these establishments one gladly takes refuge in the costly Belvedère.

Saumur was originally surrounded by strong fortifications, of which considerable remains are yet to be seen. Several picturesque towers and dilapidated walls, which

fall into the private gardens and promenades of the suburbs, have a very charming effect, heightened by the peculiar whiteness and brilliancy of the stone, which is obtained from quarries in the neighbourhood. The château is built of this stone, and has a singularly light and delicate appearance, like a bright filmy web hung in the sky, and looking as fragile as if a breath would blow it away.



Close to the town are some of those residences, literally sculptured on the face of the naked rock, which always strike strangers with so much surprise. They are cut in the stone, which is the tufa, or soft gravel stone, and easily admits of any workmanship demanded by taste or necessity. There is no little care displayed in the formation of these strange habitations, some of which have scraps of gardens or miniature terraces before them, hanging from the doorways, and green creeping things, with other graceful adjuncts, which help to give a touch of beauty to their aspect. In some cases, where the shelving of the rock will admit of it, there are chimneys, in nearly all windows; and it not unfrequently happens, especially higher up the road near Tours, where art has condescended to embellish

the façades still more elaborately, that these house-caves present an appearance of elegance which it is almost impossible to reconcile with the absolute penury of their inhabitants. The interiors, too, although generally speaking naked enough, are sometimes tolerably well furnished, having an air of comfort in them which, certainly, no one could dream of discovering in such places.

These habitations are, of course, held only by the poor and outcast. Yet, in spite of circumstances, they live merrily from hand to mouth, how they can, and by means, perhaps, not always of the most legitimate description. Their exclusion, or expulsion, from the populous haunts and tracks of life has the effect which exclusion, or expulsion, ordinarily has,—of binding them more closely together to make common cause against the rest of the world. I have a strong suspicion that the denizens of these rocks are not a whit better than they ought to be; that their immediate neighbourhood is not the safest promenade after dark; and that, being regarded and treated as Pariahs, they are born and baptised in the resentments which are contingent upon such a condition of existence. You might as well attempt to chase an eagle to his eyrie amongst the clouds, as to make your way to some of these perilous chambers, which are cut in the blank face of the rock, and can be reached only by a sinuous track, which requires the fibres of a goat to clamber. How children are reared here is more than I can conjecture. The wonder is that they do not constantly perish; yet such accidents, I believe, are rare. There are often long lines of these sculptured houses piled in successive tiers above each other: sometimes they are carved zig-zag fashion, and

sometimes with a view to architectural regularity; but in almost all cases they are equally hazardous to the unpractised foot of a stranger.

In spite of all obstructions, however, the dwellers in them have their own wild delights and amusements, which are evidently of a more riotous kind and fuller of real enjoyment than the comparatively subdued pleasures of their civilised neighbours. Stroll down the spacious quay of Saumur in the dusk of the evening, when night is about to set in, and the flickering tapers of the temperate town are going out one by one. Roars of merriment greet you as you approach the cavernous city of the suburb. There the entertainments of the inhabitants are only about to begin. You see moving lights in the distance twinkling against the grey surface of the rock, and flitting amongst the trees that lie between its base and the margin of the river. Some bacchanalian orgie is going forward. The population of the cliffs have been evidently drawn to a point; their spirits are lifted up by music and dancing; the voices of uproarious singers ring upon the ears, mixed with drunken shouts and huzzas! tipsy speeches come up bubbling through the tumultuous chaos of sounds; and now a roar of laughter overtops the Babel of noises, and the lights thicken and stagger about, and you see dusky figures moving athwart them like weird phantoms; and between the riot and the grim shapes that make such hideous pantomime in the revel, you begin to think that it is hardly safe to linger here any longer, and that you had better retreat into the peaceful darkness of the town, and betake yourself to your bed.

Saumur is lighted with gas. An English gas company

established works here in the summer of 1841, and when I visited that town, some few years afterwards, they had ample reason to be satisfied with their undertaking. But gas is now so generally introduced into the French towns, that it has long ceased to be a matter of speculation. The only point is to be first in the field; and in this respect there is not much risk of being rivalled by the French, who, for the most part, are well content to follow the old routine, without caring to venture upon any experiments which involve the outlay of time, money, or surplus energy. When such experiments, however, are made by others, and the profitable results are clearly exhibited, the French are by no means slow in availing themselves of whatever advantages they present. The same observation applies to agriculture, which is in a very backward state. There are other reasons, no doubt, for this besides want of energy, the principal being—want of capital. Yet in the districts where English skill and economy have set a successful example, the French are found rapidly improving in their system of tillage.

When I visited Saumur there were scarcely any English there; and, few as they were, they belonged almost exclusively to the gas-works. There was a resident English clergyman, living scripturally on his hopes of hereafter, for when I was in the town his congregation consisted of ten persons. According to the published authorities, the population is under 12,000, but the people of Saumur will not be satisfied to set it down at less than 15,000. In either case, the sprinkling of English units amongst French thousands is quite imperceptible. The place is yet undiscovered by our wandering economists.

On the opposite side of the river is the faubourg of Croix Verte, a village which was formerly of some consequence, and rather a lively, flourishing little place when the Paris diligences used to stop there, in preference to crossing the river; but now that the diligences and post-carriages have all gone over to wealthier Saumur, with its fine hotel, and its handsome quay, and its one wide street, poor Croix Verte is falling into ruins. By and by, there will be nothing left of it but skeleton houses occupied by people as wan and ghastly as spectres. It is fast tumbling to pieces, and, placed as it is in the midst of rich orchards and nurseries growing to seed in their wild fertility, and close to the bustling, well-paved, and well-lighted town, it has very much the aspect of a tattered beggar in a public garden, crouching down at the feet of some purse-proud citizen to solicit alms.

The decay of Croix Verte is much to be regretted, not altogether for its pretty name and the pictures which the imagination instinctively crowds about it, but because, with a little prosperity, it would have been a gracious moon waiting on a lustrous planet, if the system of Saumur permitted of such a satellite. The decline of all such small places is matter of regret, and has much the same sort of interest, humanly considered, as the most romantic history of a broken heart. While the little local business lasted that kept the suburb together in its entirety, and enabled it to go on with fair prospects of improvement, giving it room and time to take root and spread its branches on high, with destinies clustered in them as thick as leaves, all was well and happy; but when that business suddenly fell away, and in a single hour desolated the whole

spot, think how many broken hearts were there—how much misery followed—how much struggling and shifting and devising—how much hoping against hope—what new efforts were made in new directions of industry—but in vain! and how at last, when it came to be felt in the very core of that little community that the doom of the place was sealed, and that no self-movement could ever restore it, then, how those who had the power abandoned it as if it had been stricken by the plague, and those who remained were buried in despair; and, finally, how crime came stealthily into the wretched village to supply the place of honest labour, and the desperate hands of the famishing remnant of the inhabitants were raised against social order and the laws from which they derived no succour! And such is literally the case with Croix Verte. It is filled by *gamins* and a dissolute throng of vagrants and idlers of both sexes, and the fragment of business that is left is confined to two or three wretched *auberges*, where the country drivers congregate without much improving their morals or mending their manners.

Nantes is the shipping-port of Saumur, as it is necessarily of all the towns on the Loire. There is not water enough here for heavy craft, and even at Nantes they are obliged to deliver their commodities twenty-four miles nearer the embouchure of the river, unless such as can be conveyed by vessels of or under two hundred tons burthen, that being the highest which can be at any time loaded at Nantes.

Saumur is as yet unspoiled by foreign settlers; but it presents such temptations that it can hardly hope to remain much longer unexplored and uncaptured by English

colonists. It has a magnificent climate, a soil fertile to a proverb, and is, in point of natural beauty, one of the most charming spots on the Loire, and, in point of economy, one of the cheapest places in France. This last is the grand attraction to the settler; and, as there are so many of my countrymen deeply interested in such questions, I went a little out of my way to obtain an accurate, and, as far as I could, a complete view of the state of the markets.

The first object in an inquiry of this nature is house-rent. If a man cannot sit down cheaply in a country, it is useless for him to dream of living there to economise; and as house-rent is generally the heaviest and most important item, and, above all, as it admits of no retrenchment, it must be looked after with early and zealous scrutiny. In nine cases out of ten it may be taken as an infallible key to every other item of expenditure.

Well then, in Saumur house-rent is as low as any equitable gentleman, who really thinks it right and proper to pay any rent at all, can reasonably expect. It is always difficult to get at an exact estimate of charges, which must, in the nature of things, fluctuate from season to season, and which depend upon circumstances unsusceptible of generalisation; but I have endeavoured to make all allowances of that kind. In the town, houses are of course dearer than in the suburbs. This is of little consequence to strangers settling down upon narrow incomes, since they could have little desire, and would have no inducement, to live in the din of the town, when they could breathe the balmy air of the country a few roods off

at considerably less cost. Even in the town, however, the rate of house-rent, tested by our English average, is almost incredibly low. You could hire the best house in Saumur —supposing the best were to be let—for fifteen thousand francs, or sixty pounds per annum. Now this is an exorbitant rent here, and includes every luxury which the style of building affords, from the *porte-cochère* and inner quadrangle — with its boxes of gaudy magnolias and sprinkle of evergreens in front—to the outer yard and range of stabling at the back. The house itself must be understood to be of considerable dimensions; the rooms are large, airy, and commodious, and decorated in the superb fashion of French papering and painting; and nothing must be deficient which is essential for the comfort of a family preparing to encounter a handsome expenditure in the ordinary way of living. But houses of this description are not to be had, or very rarely, in Saumur. Such houses are generally built by the owners for their own use, or purchased out and out, the class of persons occupying them being, with probably not a single exception, merchants and *propriétaires*, who are not very likely to move from place to place. Besides, there are not many first-rate houses in the town, and the generality of such as are to be let or sold are not built on so large a scale. They are sufficiently large, however, for private use; and ordinarily contain seven or eight rooms, with the usual accommodations for servants. The rent of such houses may average about twenty-five pounds—houses which, in any respectable part of London, would average about five times that amount. Splendidly-furnished lodgings may be had, too, in the best quarter of the town, for thirty pounds a-year.

A little way out of the town—at a distance of six minutes' walk—you have no difficulty about prices. Here, wherever houses are to be let, the rents are so small as to suggest a suspicion that there must be something rotten in the state of Denmark. I can testify to two or three. There is one house, half way up the hill on the banks of the river, commanding a complete panorama of the country across the Loire, and of the windings of the river for many miles up and down; it occupies an admirable position, is approached by a carriage-entrance from the high-road, and lies in a sweep of flower-beds, beyond which are extensive ranges of gardens and plantations, which, being merely parted by an invisible fence, seem to belong to its grounds. In front of the house a handsome raised terrace, sheltered on all sides by lofty trees, and forming a shady and agreeable promenade, stretches away into the green gardens; and pleasant paths wind in all directions up the wooded hill at the back. The house itself has the cheerful aspect and poetical accessories of a *maison de campagne*, with something of the statelier character of the château in its turreted roof. It contains a *salle à manger*, a *salle de compagnie*, four or five sleeping-rooms, extensive accommodations for servants, brewhouses, winehouses, magazines for wood, etc., stabling, and large premises behind for all conceivable domestic purposes. The whole of this establishment, which is close to the town, and yet buried in the foliage, was to be let for sixteen pounds per annum!

On the opposite side of the river, away amongst forest-trees and leafy nooks, a merchant of the town had built a costly mansion for his own residence. It lies in a beautiful

dell, is planted all round with prodigality and taste. The house itself is perfectly modern, solid, and handsome, and is fitted up and furnished luxuriously,—a residence fit for an Englishman of fortune, to whom it would be especially recommended by the strength and finish of its architecture. It is chargeable with only one deficiency—it has no stable. The gentleman who built it, having a spacious town-house, which he intended, probably, to make his head-quarters, appears to have thought a second set of stables unnecessary at so short a distance. But the want of a stable might be so easily supplied, that it becomes an insignificant item in the consideration of the *agrémens* of this "very desirable residence." Our merchant had scarcely dismissed his last workman, and completed the house to his taste, when he found that circumstances rendered it imperative upon him to abandon his intention of residing outside the town. The house came accordingly to be let, although there was no public announcement of the fact. The reader might guess a long time before he would have the courage to guess that this house, with its grounds and plantations, was to be had for twelve hundred francs, or about forty-eight pounds per annum!

Generally speaking, on a rough, but sufficiently correct average, you may get a capital house, with two sitting-rooms, and four or five bed-rooms, a garden producing more vegetables than a family could consume, with coach-house, stable, and out-houses, for three or four hundred francs, from twelve to sixteen pounds per annum.

There was at that time an English gentleman residing in the neighbourhood with his wife and daughters, who

kept his carriage, and lived in a style which made him an object of some observation in this tranquil place, and he certainly did not expend more than one hundred and twenty or one hundred and sixty pounds a-year. The highest annual expenditure said to be laid out in Saumur has never exceeded five hundred pounds a-year; but this is extravagance, and profligacy, including useless equipages, and unenjoyable dinner-parties. Nobody lives in this way. It is a mode of life which would neither be intelligible nor acceptable to the people, and which would utterly spoil their social intercourse. The majority of people living *genteelly*, and keeping servants, hardly expend more than sixty or seventy pounds per annum. These estimates are so low as to be scarcely entitled to credit. But it is, nevertheless, quite certain that a small income here enables people to *live* more comfortably than they could in England upon treble or quadruple the outlay. Indeed, in England a family could not live at all, without severe privations, upon a sum which would enable them to live here at their ease.

The wine of the country is excellent, and cheaper than beer. It is not the sour stuff we generally expect to find as the *vin du pays*, but sound table-wine. A barrel of the best quality will cost forty francs, and the *ordinaire*, for mere dinner use, is only half that price. The barrel contains about two hundred and forty bottles. Within the town you pay the *octroi*, which is ten francs per barrel more.

In the markets we find everything equally cheap: beef, mutton, veal, lamb, six sous per pound; butter twelve sous in summer, but never exceeding eighteen sous per

pound in the winter; eggs six sous per dozen; fowls and ducks from a franc to a franc and a half per pair; a large turkey two francs; fish is generally to be had in abundance, but salmon is held to be rather dear at ten sous per pound; a large pike, that would dine twelve people, one franc and a half; sugar nineteen sous, coffee thirty sous per pound. Game is dear, a brace of partridges twelve sous; a pheasant five francs; a hare fifteen sous. Fruit is as cheap as air.

In addition to the advantages of cheapness and situation, Saumur possesses many delightful resources—agreeable society, baths, a handsome theatre, concerts, *soirées*, balls almost every week, with boats constantly passing and repassing, and carrying you for a mere trifle up and down the river to Nantes, Tours, Blois, Ancenis, Angers, and Orleans.

Cheapness is the grand consideration to the class for whose especial benefit I have collected these particulars; although, generally speaking, it is the last to which they are willing to confess. Decent pride is a wholesome thing, and helps to preserve the independence of people who are not very rich; but Englishmen carry this matter of pride to an extremity of sentiment that reduces it to burlesque. Colman's "Poor Gentleman," in the long farce of that name, hits off this national weakness with felicity. Exactly in proportion to the depth of his poverty is the height of his indignation at the offer of assistance. When the young man from Russia, who foams over with benevolence, talks of lending him money, he replies, with freezing grandeur, "I cannot think, young man, you came here to insult me!" To hint at the necessity which tempts abroad

most of the English who settle in French towns and villages, would be regarded as an unpardonable affront; yet for what else do they expatriate themselves, if not for economy? People do not voluntarily select a location in a strange land, where a strange tongue is spoken, and where they are surrounded by strange faces; they do not choose such an entire change of habits for its own sake, or out of any whim or caprice; there must be a motive, and a strong one, to induce them to make these sacrifices, for, isolated as circumstances may have kept them at home, this change cannot be made without sacrifices of the gravest kind, familiar scenes, old ties and associations, and friendships within call if not within the reach of constant intercourse. "The oak of the forest," as Grattan exclaimed upon being summoned to the British Parliament, "is too old to be transplanted at fifty;" and when fathers and mothers, who have been accustomed all their lives to a certain social routine, make up their minds to transport their families to places where they are compelled to begin the world again, there must be a motive which has a stronger influence over them than the claims and sympathies they relinquish.

The motive is transparent. At home they are exposed to a thousand distresses and humiliations; they cannot sustain their position; and there are children to be cared for, to be educated, and placed out in the world. The only alternative is to escape from this shadow, which oppresses and darkens their lives, into some country where the means of living are cheap, where education is cheap, and where they can hold their heads erect once more, breathe freely, and saunter about at their ease in the sun-

shine. What does it matter whether they live on one hundred or one thousand pounds a-year? There is no need to be ashamed of independence. Let nobody wonder, then, at the number of English, who, during the long peace, flocked into the cheap countries; the only wonder is that there were not more of them. But let nobody, out of false delicacy or base pride, mistake or make a mystery of the object which carried them there; or set up a mask of ostentation to conceal the defects of fortune.

There is really nothing in this question of domestic economy which does not affect all conditions of life more or less. It comes home (if he could be prevailed upon to acknowledge it) to the English gentleman who settles at Avranches, or Tours, on three hundred pounds a-year, quite as much as to the practical farmer who, converting his little property into capital, transports himself and his family to Van Diemen's Land. The only difference (an important one, which cuts both ways into the future) is, that the one can return when he pleases, or change his quarters at his own free will; while the other, having embarked his whole substance in a single venture, must abide the issue.

There are many people who, willing enough to enjoy the economy, have an ungracious way of depreciating its conditions. "Oh yes!" they say; "you get the necessaries of life cheap enough; but there the advantage ends. The necessaries! as if there were nothing else in the world to be thought of! In such places you are exiled from society, and must make up your mind to vegetate, resigning all hope of human intercourse. The best you

can make of it is complete banishment, with plenty to eat and drink."

This would be an excellent argument, if people could do without eating and drinking; but seeing that eating and drinking constitute the elementary condition upon which all social arrangements are unavoidably founded, the said argument is not worth much. It would be well to inquire of people who cry out in this way about society, what society the demi-fortune had the happiness of enjoying at home, or whether he really had any society at all? If he had, and could afford to cultivate it, why, in the name of all that is cozy and comfortable, should he ever dream of going into this wretched banishment where he is so vulgarly well fed? Now, the whole secret turns upon this very fact, that the man who complains of the want of society abroad was compelled to expatriate himself because he could not sustain the expense of going into society at home. The mere current cost of keeping himself in a position to make and receive visits, supposing it possible at the same time to avoid the consequent expense of entertaining company, would have drained his whole income.

But it is incorrect to assume that in these cheap places you are exiled from society. In the interior (seldom on the coast) there is excellent society—of a kind, too, which, for the most part, is rather too intellectual for the settler, consisting of the families of men of science and letters, who have taken up their residence in these localities for reasons connected with their pursuits or their personal affairs. In this respect, France is essentially different from England, and it is well to note the difference care-

fully. While the system of centralisation renders Paris the focus of political movements, drawing into the capital much of the wealth and all the fashion of the country, Literature and Science, diffusive in their results, but retired and silent in their operations, linger lovingly in sequestered retreats, or in provincial towns and villages. Almost every town has its college, at all events its public school, its museum, its picture-gallery, its library; and upon these foundations several professors are established. These professors are often men of a high order,—antiquaries, historians, botanists, geologists; each, perhaps, a man of one idea, to which he devotes himself assiduously. The provinces are, in fact, full of a class of readers and writers unknown to England. Every province has its own capital, which attracts all the surrounding interests, forming a minor system of centralisation in everything that concerns its own history, arts, science, and antiquities.

It must not be supposed that all the distinguished men of letters in France run up to Paris, as in England they run up to London. The men of fortune do, leaving their châteaux to go to ruin, while they indulge their love of pleasure and gamble away their resources in the *salons* of the capital; but men of letters stay behind to dignify and enrich the country of their birth and their labours. Fashionable novelists, dramatists, and mystics in poetry, philosophy, and religion swarm to Paris, as the only place where they can obtain encouragement and remuneration; but students who attach themselves to severer pursuits are content with the reward of discharging a useful duty in the most useful way. While Dumas, Scribe, and Victor Hugo engross the reading world of Paris, such men as

Bodin and Mahé are found publishing the fruits of their learned researches in the scenes to which they refer. This is so generally the case, that if you want to get a local history, or an account of the antiquities of a place, your best chance is to enquire in the place itself. It often happens that such works, in the ordinary course, rarely make their way to Paris.

XXXI.

LA JEUNE FRANCE.

How does it happen that France, the politest of nations in its customs, and the best dressed in its drawing-rooms and kitchens, should suffer a certain section of her population to commit the *grossièreté* of sitting at table with its hat on?

Take the run of the provincial *table d'hôtes*, and, except where a tone of dreary formality is cast over the ceremony of dinner by the presence of the English, you will generally find two or three people rushing in, clattering to the table with their hats or caps on, and eating up their dinner at the rate of a steeple-chase. The scowling looks of these gentlemen, their linen coats, voluminous waistcoats, and glowing cravats, their beards and moustachios, their violent gesticulation and hundred-horse power tongues, are quite enough to scare away all civilised people of other nations, and the well-bred of their own. This matter of dining in public has undergone a change. Ladies are not so numerous as formerly at these reunions, which used to be extremely agreeable, and full of character and vivacity; they have been a little frightened by the rough intercourse and bold conversation to which they found themselves occasionally exposed. One naturally asks, what is the

cause of this change?' and the English traveller will, probably, refer it at once to the barricades of July. Yet, there were barricades long before the days of Charles X. —the barricades of the League and the Fronde—and French courtesy survived them. But constant dropping will wear away a stone: and the frequent repetition of revolutionary experiments has not been calculated to improve the national manners. As republicanism has advanced, the refinements of the monarchy appear to have receded; at least, amongst that class which floats loosely about the country, and which may be regarded as the disturbing element of hotel existence. The style of these *farouche* people, and that of the *ancien régime*, are the antipodes of each other, the two social poles being indicated by the hat, or *casquette*, of your modern apostle of progress, and the flowing *peruque* of the last century.

The conventional graces, which we all remember to have admired so much in France a few years ago, are waning in certain directions. The age of chivalry is going from the public tables, and an age of barbarism is succeeding. What is a huge muff of hair round the face but a relic of barbarism, standing much in need of the office of the barber? What else but barbarism these great matted whiskers, curled tufts, and beds of angry bristles, in which the chin is buried? Civilisation long ago dispensed with a beard, and one of the implements of her progress is a razor. To cast away the razor, is to throw off a glittering ensign of advancement, and to retreat upon a state of nature. Perhaps, however, the French have a sufficient apology in dispensing with the custom of shaving: their cutlery is execrable. Possibly they allow their beards to

grow by way of an escape from bad razors. *Vous avez raison, monsieur!*

La jeune France, horrid monster as he looks, is very harmless notwithstanding. His fierce beard has a most threatening aspect at a dinner-table, when you see it splashed over with luscious condiments, and sprinkled with white beans and fragments of truffle; but when you come to examine the *matériel* of the figure which carries this formidable bush, your first sensation of alarm is very likely to be converted into contempt. The majority of these hirsute heroes are shadowy things crowned with a monstrous crop of hair. Legs, arms, chest, are merely the wires that bear it up. Their courage, vigour, nationality, their whole genius, soul, and muscle, are concentrated, like the strength of Sampson, in their hair. Cut off their whiskers and imperials, and you will discover nothing beneath but such slight supporters as great wigs are sometimes set upon for show.

Neither hats, nor whiskers, however, would be of much moment—although they do disturb the equanimity of the traveller—did they not imply a remoter evil. If that were all, they could be easily avoided by keeping out of the way of *table d'hôtes,* and dining in private. But one cannot so readily get clear of the reflections they suggest. They set us involuntarily thinking about social and political revolutions, changes of manners and opinions, and the thousand and one *bouleversements* of tastes, creeds, and constitutions, of which no man can conjecture the issues, and which are palpably symbolised in these anarchical modes and customs.

The origin of all this may be found in the labours of

the Encyclopædists of the last century, who deliberately and systematically devoted themselves to the task of setting aside the belief in a Providence, sapping public morals, and establishing a free creed in all matters of conduct and opinion. The first condition upon which they insisted, as being indispensable to the ulterior accomplishment of their views, was the total overthrow of existing modes and forms. The way to the Encyclopædian Utopia lay through the destruction of the established institutions, habits, and relations of society. This is not an invidious inference drawn from their arguments; it is literally their avowed design. Something more than the substitution of democracy for kingship and aristocracy was comprehended in that gigantic scheme. Nobody could have a right to complain of democracy, or any other form of government, demanded by a people; but such was not the aim of the writers and propagandists who sowed the seeds of political domestic libertinism in France. They ploughed and planted for wider and deeper changes; and Communism, and the *droit au travail,* are amongst the fruits of their industry. It was necessary to their ends, that the whole framework of social life should be broken up; that the obligations of moral and religious codes should be abrogated; that the ties of marriage, the respect of station, the delicacy of the sexes, the amenities which confer grace, dignity, and safety upon civilised intercourse should be blotted out. The generation of that day could not very readily abandon their old habits, cancel their affections, and shake off their responsibilities; and it was reserved for the incoming generation, which had not yet incurred any civil obligations, to pass through the noviciate of

anarchy, into that liberal state of existence, in which woman should no longer be treated with decorum or tenderness; in which the distinctions of rank, age, and education should be expunged, and all men placed on the same level, and chartered alike for the unrestrained indulgence of the passions. This sweeping revolution, which was to destroy the old system before it could begin to establish the new one, required time; and the attempt at its accomplishment was bequeathed to our age by that generation through whom these chaotic doctrines were promulgated and transmitted. *La jeune France* has assumed to itself the mission against which the country stood firm, until political corruptions had eaten deeply into the defences of domestic life. We have seen its political development in banquets, clubs, and conspiracies; and its social display in a crusade against old customs and good breeding.

A notion got abroad a few years ago, that the redemption of nations was to be effected only by youthful blood. Experience and matured observation were to go for nothing. No man was to be considered capable of public utility after thirty. To headlong boyhood and tempestuous youth we were to be indebted for the brilliant agencies which were to re-organise the world. Youth is at all times arrogant enough in its assumptions, and sufficiently apt to mistake rashness for courage, and to believe that it possesses, by a sort of miraculous intuition, a great deal more wisdom than older people have been able to accumulate through years of trial and collision. It hardly wanted this additional incentive, in the form of a popular axiom, to tempt it to set up for itself. Like the big blue fly that buzzes

about our apartments, bounding frightfully every now and then against the window pane, thinking that it has a clear course before it, youth, ignorant of practical difficulties, must knock its head against many impassable obstacles, before it can acquire the knowledge requisite for self-government. The secret is beginning to be found out. The popular axiom is already exploded. Neither nations nor households can be successfully upset or controlled by the "rising generation." The laws of nature are not yet repealed; and to the "risen" generation must still be confided the responsibility of state affairs and family administration.

One of the most fatal symptoms of emancipated youth exhibiting its independence of old customs is its conduct to women. The boy, when he is first let loose upon society, thinks it a fine thing to flourish his pretensions in the face of women, whom he treats with a certain air of superiority, which he imagines to be an evidence of manliness. Now, the social boyhood of *la jeune France* betrays this symptom in a violent degree. It takes great delight in sundry little coarse hectoring rudenesses thrust prominently upon ladies in public places, especially at the *table d'hôte*, and in indulging on such occasions in prohibited topics, garnished with language which makes one's ears grow intolerably hot. That it is a lineal descendant of the Encyclopædists, politically, as well as morally and socially, may be easily ascertained by any person who is sufficiently adventurous to interrogate it upon its opinions concerning things as they are, and as *la jeune France* thinks they ought to be.

The people of France are not to be confounded with

this rabid section. The mass of the proprietors, manufacturers, and shopocracy eschew these barbarian theories; although it must be allowed that a shadow has passed over the gay surface of society. The palmy days of high court breeding are gone by; we no longer witness in full pomp that pageant of polished manners which once threw such a tone of elegance over the *salon* and the promenade. The constitutional sprightliness and agreeable facility of the people will, probably, always survive in a modified form; but an aspect of thoughtfulness has supervened upon the airy gallantry of the old times. The artificial refinement, which accorded greater importance to points of etiquette than to the gravest questions of legislation, fell with the nobility; nor is there much prospect of its restoration, nor does anybody care about it except the nobility themselves, who are rapidly descending into the ranks of commerce and speculation, and whose representatives, should they ever be summoned to their state again by the trump of the herald, will be found scattered over the Bourse, the counting-house, the colliery, and the dusky chambers of the Steam Fiend.

XXXII.

CELTIC MONUMENTS.

THE finest Celtic monument, the largest and most regular, within the limits of Brittany or Anjou, is to be seen near the village of Bagneux, about a mile from Saumur. The excursion to these ancient relics is interesting for another reason, that it lies through old, tattered, unfrequented roads, which yield some curious peeps into the primitive interior.

This monument is a dolmen of a rectangular form, raised on the side of a hill, and composed of enormous blocks of sandstone. It is fifty-eight feet long, twenty-one wide, and about seven feet high from the ground. The disposition of the stones is perfectly uniform, four at each side for the walls, four for the roof, one on the left side near the entrance, one at the west, closing up the dolmen at that end; two smaller ones standing up near the entrance, and a single isolated block at the bottom, like a pillar, helping to sustain the weight of the roof. There are altogether seventeen of these immense blocks, and from some rough masonry, which may be seen supplying a vacancy on the right of the entrance, it is inferred that there were originally eighteen. Scattered about in disorder outside the entrance are some flat stones, which

it is conjectured may have once stood upright in continuation of the northern wall.

The great blocks which form this singular structure are all unhewn, yet of such equal dimensions that, with a single exception, the result apparently of an accident, they lie almost as closely together as if they had been carefully smoothed for the places they occupy. They vary in thickness from eighteen inches to two feet and a half, and are all of extraordinary magnitude; the largest, that which closes the west end, presenting a square surface of twenty-one feet to the side. It is said that, upon digging round this monument, the walls were found to be buried nearly nine feet in the earth, which would give the upright blocks a height of almost sixteen feet. The fact is remarkable, as Celtic stones in general are seldom sunk to such a depth. But in this instance there appears to have been a necessity for it, as the blocks, instead of being vertical in the usual way, incline so far towards the centre that a plummet dropped from the top would fall more than a foot from the base. It is impossible to visit these prodigious masses of stone without renewed astonishment at the marvellous mechanical power by which they were raised from their quarries, transported to their destination, and arranged in symmetrical order. In the vineyards about forty or fifty yards distant is a solitary peulven, about six or seven feet high, out of the line of the dolmen, and apparently having no connection with it; and on the top of a hill not far from the neighbouring village of Riou, is a smaller dolmen, consisting of six great stones, also set towards the east, equally regular in form, but considerably dilapidated by the action of the weather. This dolmen

presents the additional peculiarity of a flooring of flag-stones. The blocks of which these monuments are built are composed of sandstone, found in the environs of Saumur; but at such a distance from the places selected for the mystical purposes to which the Celts applied them, that they must have been carried at least half a league over a difficult country, intersected with ravines and valleys. The work of cutting these prodigious blocks out of the quarry, and of raising them from their beds, is intelligible to a people who understand the use of the wedge and the lever; but the mechanical power by which they were conveyed across rivers and hills, and placed in this regular order of walling and roofing, is utterly incomprehensible.

A glance into the dolmen of Bagneux, this vague damp hall, fills the mind with a sort of dreary wonder not very easy to describe. What could have been the object of this rude, stony temple, mausoleum, or whatever else it was? The twilight within is by no means impressive, except in the same way, but with a sort of palpable horror in it, as a great subterranean sepulchre can be felt to be impressive. When you creep in, rather shudderingly, you have an instinctive conviction of the tremendous solidity of the masses of stone around and above you, which have stood there for centuries heaped upon centuries; yet it is of so dismal a kind that you can hardly overcome a certain sense of terror lest the whole mass should fall, and crush you to atoms. It is probably the consciousness of your own weakness and insignificance in the presence of so ponderous a mystery that produces this feeling.

Formerly the neighbourhood of Saumur was scattered over with Celtic ruins, of which few are now remaining, and, even of those which are still described in the local books, some have already disappeared. They have been broken up for materials to mend the roads.

XXXIII.

TOURS.

Up the Loire to Tours, by the steamboat called the "Inexplosible," (a title which might be given to a powder magazine with as much propriety as a steamboat), will occupy you nine hours, or thereabouts. You may shorten the route, if you are in a hurry, by railroad; or, if you prefer it, enjoy a charming drive through the country, taking Chinon on your way, where you can visit the castle upon whose rocky terrace Joan of Arc made her first appearance in public, and the little farm-house, smothered in trees, in which Rabelais was born.

We have already past the most picturesque scenery. Every league we now advance the interest diminishes, and, instead of a varying succession of rocks, towns, and woods, we are forced to put up with the glowing exaggerations of the guide-books. These French guide-books are abundantly amusing, by virtue of that tendency to the wonderful and fabulous which exalts villages into cities, revels in a suppositious antiquity, and converts ragged patches of fields into pastoral Edens. Most people like this sort of extravagance; it jogs their dulness, and helps them to an imagination. But, whoever wishes to obtain accurate information must be careful how he depends upon the

historical or descriptive authority of these lively writers. "Les quais de Saumur," says one of them, "sont très riants." Everything is *riant* in the French itineraries. In vain we endeavoured to discover this particular merit in the quay of Saumur, as we had previously failed to discover it in a hundred other places. In the neighbourhood of Béhuard there is a small hill covered with vines: this, says the guide-book, "est la fameuse Coulée de Serrant dont le vin jouit d'une reputation si grande et si bien mérité." Now this wine is really very excellent; but who ever heard of it beyond the confines of the district in which it is grown? It might be supposed, from the description, that it enjoys a European reputation. What is the fact? The whole vineyard produces only fourteen barrels annually.

Looking back upon the course of the Loire from Nantes to Saumur, the spot which memory retains the most forcibly is that wide burst of the river opposite St. Florent, where the stream is broken by a richly-wooded island in the centre, the whole view forming a scene magnificent for its expanse and grandeur. From Saumur to Tours the islands are smaller and less numerous, the volume of the water becomes scantier, the banks are flatter, and the traveller has been so pampered with fine sights that he has hardly patience enough to explore the few traditions with which he must now endeavour to supply their place. But they are worth listening to, nevertheless; especially as there is so little else to occupy one's eyes or thoughts.

At the squalid village of Dampierre, of which you get a hasty glimpse on the left bank as you leave Saumur, died the celebrated Margaret of Anjou in 1482. Long before

you have half exhausted the reflections suggested by the misfortunes and heroism of that distinguished lady, you find yourself gazing upon the dilapidated inhabited château of Montsoreau, a huge edifice, with an exterior frontage pierced by long rows of casements, and crowned with lofty embattled towers and pyramidal roofs. Here lived that Count of Montsoreau, who, under the direction of Charles XI., conducted the Protestant massacres in Anjou. The château, built with great solidity, and remarkable for the spaciousness of its chambers and the beauty of its timber-work, was sold in 1804, and is now occupied by a number of families of artisans and tradespeople, who carry on their multifarious operations in its vast *salons* with a most promiscuous contempt for its feudal glories. The collection of wretched huts, called the *petite ville* of Montsoreau stands at the confluence of the Loire and the Vienne, opposite to another *petite ville* called Candes, being divided from it only by a tiny rivulet, which gave occasion to an epigram said to have existed among the people from time immemorial, and which is regarded as a capital joke amongst them:—

"Entre Candes et Montsoreau,
Il ne pait ni brebis ni veau."

On the right bank, a little further on, you sail past the castle of Ussé, a noble structure, built in great part from the designs of the famous Vauban; and still higher up, on the same side may be seen, in a state of excellent preservation, the Gothic château of Langeais, where the reunion of Brittany and France was consummated in 1491 by the marriage of Charles VIII. with the Duchess Anne. La Pile de Cinq-Mars is the next object of interest. This

strange quadrangle, whose brick masonry is as solid as a rock, has puzzled all the archæologists who have attempted to speculate upon its origin or its uses. It is nearly thirteen feet square, and eighty-seven in height, and was surmounted formerly by five pinnacles ten feet high, one of which was blown down by a storm a hundred years ago. It has neither doors nor windows, and curious investigators of the mystery have calculated that it contains no less than 118,000 bricks. On the front facing the Loire there are eleven projecting squares of a paler brick than the rest, divided into mosaic compartments; but what these were intended to typify no man knoweth. Conjecture has exhausted itself in vain upon the history of La Pile de Cinq-Mars, and the honour of its construction is zealously distributed amongst the Romans, the Saracens, and the Visigoths. Until you arrive at Tours there is nothing else to challenge curiosity except the old castle of Luynes, pitched on the summit of a commanding cliff, and increased varieties of sculptured dens on the face of the rocks.

Tours is a French town *Anglicised.* It is patched all over with modern English alterations; the old houses here and there are fronted like English houses; wherever new ones start up they are built all throughout in the style of the English; the principal shops are English; the pavement is English; and the main street, the Rue Royale, is for the most part constructed with a modern English regularity, quite foreign to the French taste. Tours, in short, is a French town spoiled. It is neither French nor English, but an unsatisfactory mixture of both—something like a *bifteck Anglais* with a heavy drench of garlic in it.

The English abounded here before the Revolution to an awful extent, especially in the environs. At one time, it is credibly asserted, there were no less than six thousand of them. They ruined the place as an economical refuge, not only raising the market prices, but introducing an extravagant style of living which completely metamorphosed its social and tranquil character. The effects are still felt in the town, which is beginning to be again overrun by its ancient invaders. No man can go to Tours to economise, nor, indeed, to enjoy life, except at an expense upon which he could enjoy himself much more rationally at home.

There are few points of interest in this city. If you see the cathedral, the old ungainly tower of Charlemagne, one or two curious houses built in the reign of Louis XI., especially the house No. 24, in the Place du Marché, and take a stroll over the bridge, you exhaust nearly everything that is worth exploring. The Cathedral, of course, is the grand object. The ornaments, with which it is literally powdered over, are so rich and prodigal, that Henry IV., by way of paying a compliment to the town, said that it ought to be put into an *étui*. He was quite right. It is only fit for a case where it could be kept safe from the atmosphere. It is, perhaps, the most remarkable specimen of architectural *bijouterie* in the world. The delicacy and fragility of the workmanship challenge unmixed admiration. The façade is like frost-work, and every speck and niche is crowded with exquisite devices, wrought in the stone with instruments as fine as the point of the diamond. The specimens of stained glass in the windows, equally elaborate, are distinguished by similar richness and finish, and their peculiarly brilliant colours falling in upon the

clustered points of the interior produce an enchanting effect. This cathedral is in the highest state of preservation, and is altogether a marvellous piece of filigree.

Although Tours is not a sight-seeing place, it is a fine town nevertheless, and contains some attractions for the antiquary which he is likely to pass over unnoticed unless they are pointed out to him. Such are the Roman remains which are scattered about the town, and which, for as much as there is of them, are solid and perfect. Close in the neighbourhood of the Cloitre de la Psalette there is yet remaining a portion of a Roman wall, and a fine arch entire. These belonged to the fortifications which were thrown up round the city by the Romans, and of which the arch formed one of the gates. While he is in this quarter the stranger ought to visit the cloisters, now only the skeleton of what they were, but still retaining enough of their original character to reward the anguish of a scramble over a dreadfully rugged causeway. In these cloisters, consisting of separate dwellings, the canons lived formerly. They run close to the gardens of the archiepiscopal palace, into which foreigners are freely admitted, particularly the English. The good old archbishop (who, it is to be hoped, is still alive,) has a special regard for the English, because England afforded him hospitality when he was in exile. Like Mr. Browning's pearl-diver, the archbishop has had two great contrasted phases in his life: the one when he was subsisting by teaching French in England; the other when, restored to his country, he dwelt in a palace at Tours.

I witnessed a striking illustration of the mobility of the French character, upon the occasion of my first visit to

Tours, some few years ago, when the place was full of English. The circumstance was trivial enough in itself, but a straw will point the course of the wind. An *émeute* might have been got up at that time at five minutes' notice, at the corner of any street in any of the principal towns. It is equally certain that it might have been as easily turned aside. During the discontents at Toulouse, and immediately after the government had dissolved the National Guard and Municipal Council of that city, I happened to be standing on the bridge of Tours, when I saw crowds of people gathering in the Rue Royale, and on the quay, and up the great road to Paris. From the centre of the bridge the view is so commanding that you can see on the one hand through the town to the Bordeaux road beyond, the trees of the avenue of Grammont being visible; and on the other, the highway to the summit of the hill. I was thus enabled to obtain a clear view of the unusual concourse of people pressing forward in this main line, and had no difficulty in concluding at once that there was something extraordinary going forward. Looking up accidentally at the old Hôtel de Ville, I discovered the cause of all the commotion. The telegraph was working in correspondence with another on the summit of the hill. The anxiety of the populace can hardly be described. The deepest interest prevailed amongst them, as they watched the fantastic motions of the telegraph, although the affair was a profound mystery to them. But, to use their own emphatic expression, they were on the *qui vive*, and at that moment of intense suspense and breathless silence, a single word would have thrown the whole mass into a convulsion. There were many thousands collected,

and we who were mere spectators of the scene, and saw the palpitation which ran through the multitude, felt as if we were on the brink of a volcano. Fortunately in the very instant when this terror was at its height, a group of drunken fellows carrying poles covered with laurels, and bearing bottles suspended from them, as a hint of the source whence they derived their courage, burst in amongst the crowd, singing some ludicrously heroic chorus. The grotesque appearance of these tipsy mimes, revolving along like corkskrews, completely upset the serious sentiment of the multitude. The dense crowd gave way, roars of laughter broke out on all sides, attention was diverted from the telegraph, Toulouse and its indignities were forgotten, aad in less time than it has taken to describe the transition, that immense gathering became inoculated with a spirit of mirth as absorbing and universal as the gravity by which it had been engrossed only a second before. The effect was sudden and astounding; and it is difficult to convey the relief it afforded to the lookers-on, who knew the reality of the peril which that chance interruption averted.

Once more upon the Loire—no longer the full green river, flowing amongst scattered islands, but a dishevelled skein of scanty water, finding out its way as well as it can, on its sleepy journey to Nantes. From this point up to Orleans, the dreariness of the river is enough to put the gayest Frenchman out of sorts. The bed of the stream is a dead waste of sand-banks, and the navigation is for the most part purely artificial, it being indispensably necessary to keep men in the water, for the purpose of clearing away the sand to make a passage for the "Inexplosible."

These poor wretches, whose lives are thus dedicated to the agonies of cramp, receive three francs a-day for a service which, in due course of time, must inevitably end in total paralysis. The sand-banks are regularly marked in the river by twigs stuck in them by these water-gods; and the pictorial effect of the said twigs, which a frisky trout might whisk off with its tail, is peculiarly ridiculous. Yet by such uncertain water-marks the steersman contrives to guide his course, and, as might be expected, sweeps many of them away, either by his own carelessness, or by the action of the ripple left by the boat in its wake. The boats themselves (which ought to be called "Indescribables," rather than "Inexplosibles") are hardly less miserable contrivances, constructed, in consequence of the shallowness of the river, to draw only ten inches of water, with the roof of the cabin raised above the level of the deck, and having no means of communication from one end to the other except by a horizontal railway jutting out over the sides, along which the sailors glide fore and aft, to the painful amusement of the company.

Considering that the actual bed of the Loire is as wide here as the Thames at Battersea, and that it is spotted all over with sand-banks, which the vessel must take an infinite variety of windings and turnings to escape, nearly doubling the actual distance before it reaches its destination, the tedium of the voyage from Tours to Orleans may be readily imagined; especially as at this part of the river there is nothing to divert the attention of the tourist, except an occasional château (a daguerreotype copy of a hundred other châteaux he has already seen), with a scrap of history attached to it, about Catherine of Medicis, or

some other imperial celebrity, which he is not exactly in a mood to investigate. To speak mildly of this voyage, it oppresses one's spirits like a London November day, let in suddenly upon the broad sunshine of an Italian summer landscape.

The *détours* which are unavoidable amongst the sand-banks, and which are frequently sudden and hazardous, increase very perceptibly the disagreeable vibration of these wretched steam-baskets. Sometimes we are fairly dragged over the sands by the main force of the engine, with the exciting expectation of being momentarily split to pieces, and sometimes we are obliged to suspend the steam altogether. It does happen, occasionally, that we are supplied with an incident to relieve the dulness, when, finding all efforts fail, the boat becomes completely locked up in a bed of sand. The consequence of all this is, that the passage is insufferably monotonous, and produces something of the nauseous sensation of a slow sea-sickness; which will be better understood when to these miseries is added the fact, that the ordinary day voyage varies from fourteen to seventeen hours. From Tours to Orleans is the worst of all. The nature of the navigation is such that the valiant steamers dare not venture out at night amongst the shoals and shallows, and the whole work must be done during the daylight. In order to accomplish this feat, it becomes necessary to start about four o'clock in the morning, just before the dawn, and even then it is not without considerable difficulty the groaning boat contrives to make Orleans between eight and nine o'clock at night, just before it has become pitch dark.

On one of these occasions we had a *troupe* of comedians

on board. They were going to open the theatre at Blois. It would be ungrateful to forget how much we were indebted to the rattle of their joyous voices for the dissipation of the surly humours we shipped at the quay of Tours. The morning was brown and hazy; an invisible drizzle hovered in the air; your coat was saturated through and through in five minutes with unseen rain; a heavy fog lay upon the river; the deck was soaked with the dews, which were still descending; vapours and mists were in full process of distillation round us; the murky islands looked water-locked (which they were not), and seemed to rise up dripping out of the current; the spectral poplars on the banks had a singularly ghastly appearance; the clouds brooded over our heads, as if they were coming down upon us, which they were, in imperceptible floods; we were as miserable as we could be, half-asleep, shivering, chilled to the marrow, and wet at heart; and in the midst of this wretchedness, our company of players were as fresh as larks, laughing, singing, dancing, and full of tricks and frolics. The principal figure in this group was a young actress, with a merry round face, bright eyes, and brilliant auburn hair, which, loosened from its bands by the vivacity of her motions, fell in clusters over her shoulders: she was the life of the wild mirth, and the rebound of her animal spirits kept the whole party in a state of incessant laughter. There was a child amongst them, and it was knocked about from one to another (but with a most tender heedlessness), petted, coaxed, teazed, pinched, blindfolded, till it was fairly bewildered between delight and terror; and whenever the game of romps slackened, recourse was had to the child to set it going again. Apart from the rest sat a pale young

man, of a poetical and indolent turn, probably the serious lover of the company, full of sentiment, and made up for melancholy, as if he were absorbed by a romantic passion, or (which was more likely) by personal vanity, not uncommon in a profession where everything depends on personal achievements. Upon this young man they vented their fun relentlessly. It was a piece of pleasant malice to turn his sentimentality inside out, and, in spite of his fine air of inspiration, to force him into their round of jibes and jokes. They would have no grand affectations of any sort; no dreamers or thinkers; nothing would suit them but the enjoyments of the hour, and people who lived in them, without a solitary abstraction or care for to-morrow. Everything with them was the fugitive pleasure within reach; they caught it flying, and as soon as one bubble burst they were off in pursuit of another.

The glee of the happy players made us ashamed of our constitutional frigidity. What was the damp uncomfortable morning to them? Their philosophy was wiser than ours. It showed us, also, the difference between people, occupied in the practical affairs of life, who set about pleasure in some degree as a matter of business, and people whose actual business is in itself the diffusion of pleasure. That which was labour to us, was the height of enjoyment to them.

XXXIV.

THE LOIRE TO ORLEANS.

Passing the pillared ruins of the Abbey of Marmoutiers on the right bank, the first noticeable object on the passage to Orleans is a whole village, Roche Carbon, carved in tufa. These cavernous dwellings increase in number as we ascend the river, but this village of Roche Carbon is the most remarkable of them all. To such habitable uses have the people turned this soft stone, that a great mass of rock which once upon a time tumbled down, and now lies in a heap at the foot of the cliffs, has been converted into a couple of very pretty cottages. The village is sculptured up the broken face of the rocks, with considerable skill; and, what with creeping vines, snatches of hanging gardens, an attempt here and there at a division of tenements, by way of slight partitions cut from the surface, wreaths of blue smoke issuing out of apertures, and curling up the front, and the old feudal beacon-tower, called the Lanterne de la Roche Carbon, crowning the summit, the superincumbent pinnacle of excavated rock on which it stands, looking as if it were ready to fall and crush the whole population beneath, this lithographed village has altogether a curiously picturesque effect.

The foundation of the ill-constructed town of Amboise,

on the left bank, is traced by tradition to Julius Cæsar; but it owes whatever attraction it possesses to a conspicuous château, elevated on the top of the rocks at the confluence of the Loire and the Amasse. It is a château of kings, and is said to have been built by Charles VII. Here Louis XI. lived; here Charles VIII. was born and died; here Louis XII. built a grand gallery, Francis I. a royal suite of apartments, and Catherine de Médicis a detached chamber sustained by four stone columns, to defeat the prediction of an astrologer, who warned her to guard against the fall of a great house. It was here that Louis XI. founded the order of St. Michael; here, under the walls, was concocted the famous Conjuration d'Ambois; here, on the centre of the bridge, was hung the chief conspirator, La Renaudie; and here, for the first time, the name of Huguenot was given to the Calvinists. In the middle of the last century, this château belonged to Louis XV., it afterwards became the property of the Duc de Choiseul, then descended to the Duc de Penthièvre, and its last royal proprietor was Louis Philippe. Its battlemented walls, supported by massive bastions, its round towers and pointed roofs, shooting up into the air like needles, form a Gothic *ensemble* worthy of its historical memorabilia.

Sailing past the pretty village of Chaumont, crested with a château, where Catherine de Médicis shut herself up to consult the stars, and the hovels of Chouzy on the opposite bank, we come to Blois, the chief town of the department of the Loire-et-Cher. It is built in an amphitheatre, from whence it climbs up the hill, and, like most of these river-cities, is crowned on the extremity of the ridge by a dismal old castle. The aspect of Blois from the water is very

striking, with its handsome quay shaded by trees, its perpendicular streets, and antique architecture. It was in this castle that the Guises were murdered, under the personal superintendence of Henri III., one of the most atrocious deeds in the records of that sanguinary age. The next noticeable object is the Donjon Tower of Beaugency, rising above the houses of an old town that nestles in a dell between two hills. This square tower, originally one hundred and twenty-five feet in height, but now only one hundred and fifteen, is one of the most remarkable buildings on the Loire. The date of the structure is unknown; but it is certainly anterior to the eleventh century, when it formed part of the palace of the lords of Beaugency, at that period one of the richest and most powerful families in France. It bears unmistakable evidences of great antiquity and extraordinary strength; and has a grand air, standing up against the sky, far above the houses of the town, with the evening-light breaking through its shattered windows, and falling slantingly on its grey, cold walls. The bridge of Beaugency, with its twenty-eight arches, is also worthy of particular attention, from the accuracy and beauty of the masonry, which is very quaint and solid.

A glance at the red castle of Mehun staring out through a group of trees, and the *campanile* of the church of Nôtre Dame de Cléry, a league off up the country, and we are at Orleans, as cold as we started, and heartily sick of our steam drag up the Loire.

The history of the city of Orleans is full of interest; the place is of great antiquity, the Genabum of the Romans, rebuilt and re-christened in the third century by Marcus

Aurelius, and besieged, pillaged, and burned in turn, by Gauls, Romans, Normans, and English. It is situated in the centre of France, on the banks of a noble river: it contains upwards of forty-five thousand inhabitants; commands a considerable trade in wine, brandy, groceries, drugs, and pottery; and is, without doubt, the most abominably filthy town on the continent of Europe. This is not a hasty exaggeration. It is impossible to find terms adequate to the description of its horrid stenches, close streets, and unhealthy atmosphere. It has one fine street, the Rue Royale, which leads up from the river to the Place du Martroi; and another, Rue Jeanne d'Arc, short, but broad, and tolerably airy, which runs from the Rue Royale to the cathedral. With these exceptions, Orleans is nothing but a deeply-dissected mass of unsavoury mud.

Exclusive of the new railroad hotel, which may be fairly excluded, as railroad hotels do not suit all classes of travellers, the choice of the visitor approaching from the Loire lies between three or four hotels situated in the centre of the town. The Hôtel du Loiret enjoys the reputation of being the best, and is set down by competent authority as being "excellent for families." We must all speak of such matters, if we would speak honestly, out of our own experiences. Now this Hôtel du Loiret is as close as a brewer's vat, and redolent of much the same sort of dry, heavy smell. Moreover the people have grown fat, and morose to boot, upon their reputation, and are by no means "excellent for families," unless it be excellent to leave families to do as well as they can upon the smallest possible amount of civility and needful attendance. There is nothing so repulsive as the first hotel

in a town like Orleans, where the first hotel is scarcely endurable. The host is generally a fellow who puffs his cigar in your face, and orders his insolent menials to do what he ought to do himself.

The Hôtel de France is in the Place du Martroi. So far so well. All the bustle and uproar in the town,—the dancing-dogs, and organ-grinders,—the postillions and diligences,—the processions of schools and priests,—the tramp of the Garde Nationale,—and the great market and traffic of the place, go forward under the windows of this hotel. Whoever takes delight in the din and clash of horses' hoofs, the cries and screams of itinerant vendors, the cracking of whips, the yelling of dogs, the shrieking of children, the bleating of sheep, the bellowing of cows, and the blowing of horns, may be strongly recommended to secure a front room in this establishment. It is admirably adapted for persons having a taste for such amusements; is ill-furnished, very confined, and up its staircase and through its dingy apartments presents satisfactory proofs of the miscellaneous character of the guests its peculiar advantages usually attract.

The Hôtel de l'Europe, in a neighbouring street, also sets up to take rank in the first class. But a first class hotel in Orleans is a relative term, as it is everywhere else. This vast building is chiefly resorted to by rats. Whether human travellers ever take up their abode here is more than I can determine, the wooden stairs and galleries being in so crazy a condition, that it would not be quite safe to explore the place in search of evidence to this interesting fact. A fat woman, wrapped in a mighty shawl, is the presiding genius of the place. She glares

upon you the moment you appear within the yawning *porte cochère*, and her huge bulk is indefinitely expanded by the addition of a chubby child she carries aloft on one red arm. In the other hand, if it be night, she swings about a dim thin candle, which, having the effect of increasing the gloom, gives to her figure a sort of supernatural amplitude. There is no specimen of mankind to be seen. Bats, rats, and overgrown women, alone frequent this rank and dangerous quarter. The quadrangle within, with its rickety ascent up a flight of wooden steps into a hanging gallery, that creaks warningly under your foot, its crooked windows tier above tier, looking as if they were ready to fall out of the drunken façade in which they are inserted, and its smoky tiles toppling over the roof, has the appearance, upon the sudden first sight, of a den carved in the bowels of a mine. The tall dizzy buildings, narrowing towards the roof, the tottering beams of timber by which they are supported, and the aspect of the decay that broods over the whole interior, impresses you with the notion of a place in the very crisis of falling to pieces, and the moment you enter you instinctively close your eyes, and put your hands on your ears, to shut out from both senses the coming crash and all its contingent horrors.

Out of these dreadful places you make your escape to the Boule d'Or, and may consider yourself fortunate if you obtain a room here. The Boule d'Or is a comfortable old house. It has by no means a fashionable reputation, but it has a reasonable circulation of oxygen, which is better. This hotel, which has not yet achieved the honours of a notice in the guide-books, is spacious, and

tolerably clean. You must not look for more in Orleans, and out to be grateful for so much. The people are neither above nor below their business; have a provincial abundant hospitality in their looks; are as slattern and familiar as can be desired; never shock your nerves by being in too great a hurry to execute your orders; have plenty of room for all their transactions in the way of posting, diligencing, and eating and drinking; have *table d'hôtes* at all hours for travellers passing and repassing by the public conveyances; and may claim implicit credit for that species of impromptu cookery which furnishes anything you want at a moment's notice, without allowing you time to speculate on the ideal of your dish till it smokes on the table before you. There is great convenience in this attention to one's desires; although your fastidious traveller is so insensible to the advantage of rapid cookery that he is apt to distrust it in a house where people are dining all day long, and where things are, as it were, always ready. He suspects that where things are always ready they must be, in the nature of standing caloric, more or less overdone; that, having once exceeded the delicate point of accurate perfection, they are likely to pass into a region of subterfuge and mystery, where disguised fragments from the day before, swimming in mottled brown gravies, are put into requisition in the stewing-pan to impart an artificial flavour to the exhausted ligaments of some fraction of meat which had long since yielded up its nourishing elements to the fire. He suspects that the virtue is in the heat alone, and has no inclination to test the correctness of his suspicions by practical experiments. But travellers should not be too fastidious in a

respectable, well-to-do hotel, especially as it is the only hotel in the whole grand city of Orleans, in which you can breathe at your ease; in which you can enjoy a slight remove from the shrieking din of the *cafés* and *estaminets*, reeking with odours of booths and stables; and in which you can make up your mind to go to bed at night without the fear of being suffocated by vapours, or crushed by the falling-in of the roof. Besides all this, the house is very ancient, and retains some interesting traces of former ages. The visitor cannot do better than spend half an hour in one of its court-yards, to admire the fragments that yet remain of beautiful windows and rich stone tracery, which may be assigned, perhaps, to as early a period as the fifteenth or sixteenth century.

XXXV.

THE SHOW-HOUSES OF ORLEANS.

ORLEANS may yet become a fine city, and there seems a disposition to render it so on the part of the inhabitants, who have buried and blinded themselves for years past in stones and mortar. The situation is highly favourable to their laudable building ambition. The quays are commodious and handsome; the bridge is worthy of a great town; and the promenades are picturesque and spacious, although very ill kept. The French are dilatory in the labours of improvement; but, considering what they have done within a comparatively short period in *trottoirs*, high-roads, and street lighting, we ought not to despair of seeing Orleans spring up one of these days into a noble city out of its present mire.

A Roman circus was discovered close to the town in 1820, but not a vestige of it is now to be seen. The remains have been removed, and a few loose stones scattered over the highway are all that mark the place of the barbarous spoliator. In lieu of the circus, however, they tell us a story about a battle, of which this *was to have been the scene*, between an English army of three thousand men and a body of French troops. It seems

that St. Agnes, the patroness of Orleans, having some reason to suspect that if the fight took place the city would be very likely to fall into the hands of the English, took the precaution of striking the whole three thousand blind on the spot, so that there was no battle after all. The French tell stories of this description with such genuine *gusto* as to leave us no alternative but to suppose that they believe them.

In the Place du Martroi there is a bronze statue to the memory of La Pucelle, the pedestal of which is embellished with four bas-reliefs, representing four remarkable incidents in her life. This statue has received unbounded encomiums from the French critics; but, with the exception of the bas-reliefs, the whole affair is essentially vulgar and theatrical. The figure of the maid is thrown into a stage attitude, as if she was about to spring a pirouette, with a heavy helmet on her head, and a crown of flowers in her hand. It is a pity that in the attempt to do honour to her memory they should thus cover her with ridicule.

The houses of Agnes Sorel, of Diana of Poitiers, and of Francis I. (which was so much frequented by the chaste Diana, that it could hardly have been called his own), are amongst the principal sights of Orleans. The mistresses of the kings of France make a greater figure in history than their queens. Orleans is especially distinguished for the conservation of memories of this description. It boasts of having given the title of duke to a member of the royal family; it might also boast of having given more celebrity to royal licentiousness than any other city in France.

Agnes Sorel, like our own Nell Gwynne, did some good

in her own way, and is said to have been a gentle-hearted being, which was a grace in her circumstances. The house, still shown to strangers, although it is fast falling to decay, was once of vast magnitude and almost fabulous magnificence. The printed account of it circulated in the town, no longer applies to the dilapidated mansion. The outer doors, carved with singular skill, and the capacious staircase, capable of accommodating the ascent of six persons abreast, may yet be seen. But the house is now broken up into different tenements, and divided amongst numerous lodgers, who rent it in flats and single apartments,—all of them artisans, some of whom prosecute their crafts in the very chambers built so luxuriously for his beautiful mistress by Charles VII. A *sabot* maker has taken possession of one half of the lower part, and made a *magazin* of a gorgeous *salle*, whose former glories are yet testified by the grand fireplace and mantelpiece, over which the proprietor has scrawled an inscription in chalk, requesting the "*Messieurs et Dames*" not to forget the "*bonne*" who shows the house. A narrow passage, dark and dingy, divides the shop of the *sabot* maker from that of another handicraftsman who occupies the remainder of the spacious ground-floor. When you ascend the stairs to the interior, you can only get as far as the gallery, which is yet in tolerable repair, and runs along one side of the quadrangle. If you wish to penetrate further, you must obtain the express permission of the tenants, one after another; but there is nothing more to see, except the progress of destruction which this rich piece of architecture is daily undergoing in the hands of the Vandals who infest it. The upper part of the house is

falling in; and unless something be done speedily to save it, the whole will soon be a heap of ruins.

The house of Francis I. is still more rapidly going to decay. It has been leased out to a wool manufacturer, who has converted the banqueting-hall into a workroom, and filled its most spacious apartments with machinery. Notwithstanding this desecration, the mantel-piece of the banqueting-hall is still standing, and tattered fragments of the grand old tapestry still cling in patches to the walls. A gallery on the left of the quadrangle survives the general ruin, with its beautiful flooring quite perfect, and quite enough of its rich carving to afford a suggestion of what it must have been originally. The upper part of this gallery is supported on Doric pillars, intersected by arches, and the lower part by Corinthian columns, all of which, with one exception, are formed from a single block of stone. The capitals were formerly exceedingly rich, as may yet be seen by scraps which have been left uninjured; but in the progress of time, under the ruthless hands to whose guardianship the place has been committed, nearly the whole of the ornaments have been broken off. There are two stone staircases in the interior in good preservation, of remarkable elegance and solidity. Formerly there were two iron balconies, one above the other; there is now but one. The owner of the house thought that the other was getting dangerous, and instead of expending a few francs to restore and preserve it, he adopted the cheaper course of taking it down. The remaining balcony which is no longer safe, the boards having long since rotted, and the iron-work having given way in several places, is a fine specimen of working in metal, various,

light, and tasteful, the patterns consisting of bunches of fruit, scrolls and heads. There are two or three rooms which the owner preserves just as they were kept in the time of Diana, but which he also keeps to himself, under lock and key; and unless he happens to be in Orleans when you make your pilgrimage to this ancient place, and, moreover, to be at leisure, and in the humour to oblige you, these precious reliques are sealed treasures. Never was a show-place so ill cared for as this. The lower part of the house is in such a state of decadence that the chambers are artificially supported by numerous beams of wood propping up the walls and ceilings. The poor woman who lives here, and who keeps house here, sleeps in a room sustained in this way, and never goes to bed without dreaming that the whole building has fallen down upon her and killed her—a dream which will, no doubt, be realised some night.

The house of Diana of Poitiers, which has fortunately got into the hands of a gentleman who purchased it for the purpose of living in it, and keeping it up, is in good order, for as much of its antiquity as was spared at the Revolution. The rooms are all modernised, but as the architecture could not undergo any very considerable alteration in the crowded situation in which the house is built, we have still the external outlines of the mansion complete. The Italian façade richly decorated, may be seen from the inner court, which forms the private entrance to the house.

Much more interesting than all these is the house of the Annonciade, or the Cabinet of Joan of Arc. In this house Joan is said to have resided when she first came

to Orleans. It was originally a convent, and afterwards belonged to the king's jeweller. The front cannot be mistaken by any person passing up the street; the extraordinary beauty of its embellishments will be apparent at once. The cabinet is a small room, having walls four feet thick, and a ceiling of stone, carved with allegorical devices, said to represent the Loire. This carving is deep and curiously coloured. There is a chamber above of the same dimensions, similarly built and carved, which was the sleeping-room of Joan. The cabinet (consisting of these two rooms) stands out from the rest of the building, and looks into an extremely pretty garden. The windows are richly groined and surrounded with quaint carvings, which carry an air of antiquity not very easily determined. A gentleman who has written a history of Orleans made the disagreeable discovery that these rooms were built since the time of La Pucelle. We do not relinquish our faith in them for all that. It is much pleasanter to sit in them, and to think that Joan sat in them, and that she dreamt glorious dreams here, scaled ladders in her sleep, and mapped out her future victories on the carved ceilings, than to believe the historian. Such discoveries are extremely uncomfortable.

There are two portraits of La Pucelle to be seen at Orleans, one in the Mairie, an indifferent picture representing her in female costume, and the other in the house of a furrier. The latter is considered a good likeness, and is painted on a banner which was presented to the town by Francis I. Here the heroic maid is exhibited in a full suit of armour, kneeling on the left hand of the Virgin and Child, with clasped hands uplifted in the

attitude of prayer. The banner itself has seen some rough service, was nearly cut to shreds by the Huguenots, and was hidden in a garret at the time of the Revolution, from whence it was rescued only a few years ago by the patriotic furrier, who, being an archæologist, has also made a collection of many other curious reliques of antiquity.

The railway-bell tingles in our ears. We are only four hours from Paris: so, taking leave of the Loire, we commit ourselves to the train; but as we can have nothing to say about Paris which is not familiar to all the world, we here drop the curtain on France.

BELGIUM

AND

HOLLAND

I.

THE SHORES OF THE LOW COUNTRIES.—ANTWERP.

HOLMAN, the blind traveller, tells us that he went to Sierra Leone for the benefit of his health. Miasma, coiling like a wet snake round the lungs, is a curative process rather difficult of belief. But change of scene works miracles. It flutters the blood, breaks up the lethargy of monotonous habits, and sets the springs of life going with renewed elasticity. Observe that obese, middle-aged gentleman, in the broad-leafed, fawn-coloured travelling-hat, how he stands gazing at the odd costumes of the people in the market-place. At home he doesn't walk two miles a-day, on an average, spends a couple of hours of a morning over the newspaper, and crawls about, very much after the manner of a turtle, till dinner-time. Now, ever since he has come abroad he has been in a perpetual flurry; clambering up old cathedral towers, and driving about to ruins and museums, palaces, and picture-galleries, from the moment he gets out of bed till he gets into it again. He is thinner, and lighter, and airier already; and begins to chuckle and crack jokes with a sprightliness which quite alarms his family. The novelty of the transition awakens his whole faculty of observation, such as it is; and the perpetual motion has given wings to his animal spirits.

He is a new man, for the time at all events; and how long the healthful influence of this sudden metamorphosis will last must depend upon himself.

The experiment of the virtues of change is put to a hard test in Flanders; for never was shore so dismal, or land so like water. At the first sight of the line of coast, unvaried by a solitary undulation, and lying apparently below the level of the ocean, a crowd of dreary images rise up before you; you think of the margin of the Dead Sea where the apples appropriately turn to ashes,—of the gloomy lip of the Stygian lake, seen afar off in some dusky picture,—of a thread of smoke on the verge of the horizon, —or of anything rather than a country covered with verdure, and thrilling to its centre with a busy population. The shore is so low that you wonder the water does not drown it; and, as you approach nearer and nearer, your wonder increases to observe how this dead flat becomes gradually developed into an inhabited country, ranges of sallow poplars, clusters of tiled roofs, church domes and spires, mills twirling upon the bleak banks, or glittering through the trees, and fields of pea-green corn rising up like apparitions in solemn succession. Yet this is the land whose northern settlements remote history informs us belonged to the fishes when the world was in its prime, o whose people Pliny entertained an awkward doubt whether they were denizens of the earth or the ocean, and which is described by Butler as

> "A country that draws fifty foot of water,
> In which men live as in the hold of nature."

The fogs that hang upon this coast are so dense that you are sometimes obliged to cast anchor within ten or

twelve miles of land till they clear off, before you can venture to enter the mouth of the Scheldt. The Zealand group, of which inglorious Walcheren is the principal, looms first out of the mist. The derivation of the name, *sea-land*, tells the whole story. It is all sea-land. The embankments on the sea-verge are high; but the meadows within—the *polders calamiteux*—are occasionally overflowed, notwithstanding; an extremity for which provision is made further inland by dykes and drains. A few years ago, subsequently to the Revolution, but before the boundary treaties were completed between Holland and Belgium, a Dutch guardship used to lie at anchor here, to prevent the Belgian flag from passing into the Scheldt. It was humiliating enough to cross in a Belgian vessel at that time, and witness the ceremony of striking the national flag, black, saffron, and red, and hoisting the Union-jack in its stead, that the good ship might obtain a free entrance to her own port. All this is gone by now; two Kings of Holland have surrendered their sceptres in the interval; the guard-ship has resolved itself into another Flying Dutchman, and vanished from the face of the waters; and the navigation of the river is free.

Entering the river by daylight, and sailing close under the coast, you get a fine view of Flushing, the capital of Walcheren. If you can exorcise Lord Chatham, and his unfortunate expedition out of your thoughts, you will enjoy the cleanly and hive-like appearance of the place. The hasty panorama of arsenal, church, and Hôtel de Ville, which you thus obtain, will be sufficient to satisfy all the interest an Englishman can be reasonably expected

to take in a scene blistered over with such terrible memoirs. A few hours' sail, swiftly consumed in gazing on embankments and breakwaters, stray forts, and dreary marshes, brings you to the quay of Antwerp.

The most favourable moment to visit Antwerp is during the *fête* of the Revolution. You will then have the city in its holiday-suit; and no city looks livelier in its finery, or duller in its ordinary work-a-day dress. Formerly Antwerp was the centre of a vast commercial system; and Napoleon built an *entrepôt* and basins here, with a view to the establishment of a great trade, for which its position renders it peculiarly adapted; but the Revolution dispersed its merchants, who withdrew for the most part to Holland, just as its silk-manufacturers nearly three centuries before were forced, by the tyranny of Alva, surnamed the Cruel, to seek refuge in England. The immediate effects of the Revolution were disastrous to the Belgians; and, although their great industrial energies have finally enabled them to recover much of their former prosperity, an air of languor and depression still broods over their principal cities. The anniversary of the Revolution dissipates the habitual gloom, and, like a sudden burst of gay music in the streets, draws the inhabitants out of their dingy shops and counting-houses, and sets them dancing in the open air.

The aspect of drowsy, stately old Antwerp, under the influence of this annual inspiration, is as picturesque as can be desired. The quay is crowded with people in quaint Flemish dresses, sprinkled with charming lace-caps and mantles, gaudy shawls, and pert little snowy gowns, clasped round the waist with blue or rose-coloured ribbons,

and cut short at the hips to give full effect to a flowing dark petticoat. There is a boat-race on the river, which is covered with a variety of craft; the *estaminets* looking out upon the water are full of guests, roystering, singing, and making love in rather a riotous fashion; and in all the open spaces hundreds of idlers are engaged in athletic games. The most popular of these amusements is a contest for prizes of coats, caps, handkerchiefs, watches, &c., suspended from the top of a tall mast, which is greased to the summit. The humour of the game consists in the difficulty of climbing up this slippery pole to clutch at the prizes; and, as the majority of the candidates are tolerably certain to get a severe fall, a quantity of hay is placed at the bottom to receive them. At each failure the crowd sets up a tremendous roar of laughter, which is exceeded in volume only by the stunning shouts that hail the occasional victor. What with the more subdued vivacity of the promenades, the chorus of happy voices from the river side, the laughter of girls as they come trooping in broken groups up the narrow streets, the ringing of bells, and the low music of the *carillons*, which you catch every now and then as you pass through some still nook of the city, a stranger at this brief season of enjoyment might imagine Antwerp to be utterly abandoned to the pursuit of pleasure.

The relapse into its every-day life presents a striking reverse. It is dull almost to melancholy; a piece of storied ground, animated only by traditions of its history

and its arts. The visitor who runs after fugitive excitements will be disappointed in Antwerp; but the student of historical antiquities, of sculpture and painting, may long linger here without exhausting the delights that await him.

The *café*, which may be regarded as the visible sign of continental gaiety, cannot be said to exist in Antwerp. There is but one, and it is incredibly dreary. Enter it, and you will find a few persons buried in a trance of dominoes, and, perhaps, a couple of sedate citizens playing at *écarté*, with as profound a gravity in their faces as if they were sitting on an inquest. The genius of the Antwerpens does not run in that direction; and, while you are

wandering about in search of a flash of mirth, the good people are quietly housing themselves in their dark

rooms, tranquilly enjoying their domesticities. Your only refuge, if you are determined to see a little life, is in one of the *estaminets*, where for a trifle you may indulge till midnight in Louvain beer, and the frolics of flower-girls, wandering Savoyards, sailors, and country-dealers. Outside that turbulent spot all is still and motionless.

Take advantage of this stillness, and the fading light of evening, to visit the famous cathedral. It is when the shadows of the twilight are falling through the stained glass, and slowly darkening the vast aisles, that the simple grandeur and solemn beauty of this noble pile touch the imagination most deeply. The broad noon is necessary for the pictures and the carving, of which the world has heard much, yet never can hear enough. Here are Rubens' great pictures, the "Descent from the Cross," the "Elevation of the Cross," and the "Assumption of the Virgin." Out of this country, except in copies and criticisms, and a few carefully-finished small works, such as the "Chapeau de Paille," Rubens is not thoroughly known. Here we have him in the full glory of his broad, liberal hand, his extraordinary power of composition, his hot colours, his jolly angels and voluptuous Flemish women, with hogsheads of red wine in their faces. It is only in Belgium that we have the means of appreciating the greatness of Rubens — his great vices and great merits; his wondrous facility and masterly invention, the energy and largeness of his treatment, and his utter want of poetical feeling. The "Assumption of the Virgin" may be specially referred to as a specimen of the excesses to which this celebrated painter frequently committed

himself. The grouping is confused, the tints are as scattered as if a rainbow had been broken over the canvas, and the deep blue sky at the back, unrelieved by warm colours or depth of shadow, has the effect of making the picture at once cold and glaring. No wonder! Rubens executed this immense painting in sixteen days! All the other works in the cathedral have been thrown into the shade by the presence of Rubens, but there are two or three which deserve careful examination. One of them is a head of the Saviour, supposed to be painted by Leonardo da Vinci, which will be found framed and glazed on a white marble slab in one of the aisles. The face is divine. "St. John in the Wilderness," by Murillo, hung up in a side chapel, out of the glare of Rubens, is another masterpiece. The forlorn and dismal aspect of the landscape, and the devotional attitude of the Saint, whose imploring eyes shed a soft and tender light upon the scene, are highly poetical. The colouring is carefully subdued, and the disposition of the lights adapted with consummate skill to a very difficult subject. Here, too, as throughout the whole of Belgium, we have the finest examples of wood carving extant. The lofty pulpit by Verbruggen is a colossal piece of work, supported by four figures, representing the four quarters of the globe (that of Africa being specially remarkable for the delicacy of the limbs, and characteristic expression of the head and features), surrounded by fruits, flowers, trees, and animals proper to their several climates, with apocryphal additions, which a naturalist would be puzzled to classify. The variety of surfaces are brought out with wonderful effect, and, upon the whole, this pulpit, although not the most showy and

elaborate, is certainly one of the most perfect works of its kind in the Netherlands.

Having occasion to call at the Hôtel de Ville, where we found the clerks sitting in antique chambers, whose walls and ceilings were covered with old paintings and carvings, we ventured to ask permission to examine these curious reliques. Such crowds of sturdy Flemish burghers, and cavalcades of rich horsemen, and priests, and grand ladies, as the prompt politeness of the official gentlemen enabled us to pass through! From room to room we stepped amongst drums, and banners, and bastions, religious ceremonies, and civic anniversaries. The whole ancient world of the Low Countries, its commercial wealth and warlike pomp, surrounded us on all sides, in a succession of pictorial representations, equally distinguished by picturesqueness and fidelity. In one apartment there was a view of Antwerp, from the Tête de Flandres, a vast panorama, defective as a work of art, but singularly interesting from the closeness and accuracy of the details; and in another, a multitudinous procession wending along the Place de Mer, embracing an incredible variety of figures, painted towards the close of the fifteenth century. The colours of this production are nearly as fresh as ever, and not a single spot appears to have been retouched. The vast concourse of people, their faces and dresses individually discriminated with the usual minuteness of the Flemish school; the splendid burst of flags and glittering arms surrounding the fountain of the Crucifixion; the long train distinctly exhibited to the remotest point in the distance; and the fantastic houses, with their jutting roofs standing up against the sky, are delineated with sur-

prising transparency and completeness. This picture is an absolute curiosity in its way. Tourists should always remember that the Hôtel de Ville, although its tattered interior is seldom chronicled in the guide-books, contains some of the choicest remains of the early art-glories peculiar to this country.

In the Museum there are also some old Flemish pictures, which have been doomed to oblivion by travellers and critics, and even by the local historians, literary and peripatetic. Some thirty works contributed by Rubens, Vandyke, and Jordaens, and the elaborate fantasies of Francis Floris and his renowned son-in-law, Quentin Matsys, have absorbed all the worship, and consigned the quaint treasures of national art to total neglect in the dingy nooks and closets where the managers of the institution have buried them. They possess striking merits, notwithstanding, and their peculiarities are interesting as being illustrative of the style, mode of handling, life and costume, of an extinct school and remote age. One of these, a representation of a *fête* given at Tervuren to their royal highnesses Albert and Isabella, is a charming piece of obsolete art. It was painted by Adam Willaerts, who was born at Antwerp in 1577, and died at Utrecht. The subject, as usual, is an exact portrait of the place; a large lake in the centre, richly wooded at the back, and a foreground crowded with figures, every one of which is painted with scrupulous precision. The union of general harmony and minute finish is worthy of notice in this picture; the singular care which the artist has bestowed upon the most trivial parts, in no way injuring the massed effects of the composition as a whole. There is a remarkable picture

here by David Teniers, hung up in a dim corner of a very shabby little side-room, by way of emphatically marking the estimation in which works of its class are held, even when consecrated by the pencil of Teniers. It might be supposed that the mere name of the artist would have commanded more consideration in Antwerp, which owes much to him. He was born here in 1610, and was one of the first directors of the Academy of Design, for which he solicited and obtained the title of Academy Royal from Philip IV. of Spain, in 1663. The subject of this painting is the Relief of Valenciennes, and it is as fine in its details as the lace for which that city has long been celebrated in the drawing-rooms of Europe. In common with all such local pieces, the centre presents a distinct plan of the city and the position of the armies; and on the right, towards the bottom, there is a group of horsemen and soldiers, in the best manner of the artist. The battle-scene is surmounted by an arch of triumph, composed of a collection of armour and weapons, and amongst the surrounding embellishments are set a number of medallion portraits, said to be faithful as likenesses, and exhibiting the finish of enamel. There are some things here by Daniel Seghers and Corneille Schut, which ought not to be passed over in the crowd of inferior celebrities. Schut, a pupil of Rubens, was born in Antwerp in 1590, where he died in 1676, and appears to have attained considerable fame for miniature heads. Seghers excelled in flowers, which he painted truthfully, and composed into groups remarkable for delicacy, freedom, and taste. He, too, was born at Antwerp in 1590, entered the Society of Jesus as a lay brother, and died in 1660. He furnishes the garlands which

surround the heads and half-lengths of Schut; and the three or four specimens preserved here of their joint labours are curious and interesting.

Turning from these works of pictorial art, let us peep at the sculpture of Mount Calvary, the most singular sight in Antwerp. Mount Calvary stands in the garden of the church of the Dominicans, now called St. Paul's, and, in spite of the power developed in particular figures, the general design is in such vile taste as to produce feelings of downright disgust. A tall, narrow heap of cinders, built up with bits of glass, cracked stones, and broken bricks, represents on its summit the agonies of the Crucifixion, with such attendant circumstances as monkish genius could contrive, to give a startling effect to the unseemly show. Angels, supposed to be looking down from heaven, are seen floating above like dumplings, while a hideous gigantic Virgin stands below, receiving in a cup the blood of the Saviour, which spouts out from a height of five or six feet. By way of bringing home palpably to the spectator the incidents of holy writ connected with the Redemption, numerous figures are scattered over the garden, amongst which are to be found St. Peter, with his eternal keys, the four evangelists, and a bevy of favourite saints. The meeting of the Saviour and the Virgin Mary in the garden occupies an enclosed space set apart for the purpose, after the manner of Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors, which is fairly eclipsed by this crowded collection, in which, to say nothing of sacred personages, we are familiarly introduced to the *élite* of the calendar. There are upwards of sixty statues altogether, independently of numerous minor figures, some of them the productions of

the most distinguished sculptors of the Low Countries, De Kock, Verbruggen, Vervoost, Quellyn, &c. A frightful background, composed of gloomy arched recesses, and containing the tomb of the Saviour, and a comical representation of the physical tortures of purgatory, completes the exhibition. A lamp burns inside the tomb to display the body of the Saviour, which is laid out on a couch, covered with pompous lace, and surrounded by tinsel offerings; and through a grating behind may be discerned groups of distorted heads and figures, grotesquely tossing about in waves, and tongues of wood, painted a fiery red to look like a conflagration. It appears that the world is indebted for this unique union of the revolting and the ludicrous to two Dominicans, who, visiting Jerusalem in 1709, brought home a sketch of Mount Calvary, from which they constructed the barbarous design. The worst of it is, that all Eastern travellers who have seen the imitation, agree in declaring that it does not bear the remotest resemblance to the original.

There is some rich carving in the confessionals of this old church. But the artists, or the priests under whose directions they worked, appear to have indulged occasionally in a taste for strange incongruities. Upon one of these confessionals you will find clustered the figures of Albertus Magnus and the Virgin Mary, a couple of stout angels, and the Almighty, in person, bursting through the clouds, the whole enclosed in a border of embossed portraits. In such cases the designs were evidently chosen by the priests, for it is impossible to suppose that the hands which executed the details with such surpassing grace

could ever have been united to the monstrous fancy which conceived them. A quaint picture of the Seven Acts of Charity, by the father of David Teniers, ought not to be overlooked as a sample of Flemish art; and a figure of the Virgin, gorgeously dressed, with a glory-crowned infant in her arms, a gold-sprinkled mantle over her shoulders, and a bunch of flowers in her hand, mounted on a globe in the middle of the nave, may be pointed out as a conspicuous example of the superstitious frippery which so often offends the eye amongst the artistical treasures of these churches. Here, too, is Rubens' celebrated picture of the "Scourging of Christ," the grand point of which is the concentration of the light on the flesh in the centre. Rubens understood this subtle resource better than all other masters, and sometimes availed himself of it in the most perilous ways, such as employing white draperies round naked figures, and always succeeding best where the risk was greatest.

Antwerp is full of Rubens. Something of his is to be seen in nearly all the churches, and not the least interesting memorial is his tomb in the church of St. Jacques. In the museum they have carried his glorification so far as to preserve his arm-chair in a glass case. Art is, in short, the distinguishing feature of a city which has given birth to the greatest painters of the Low Countries—Francis Floris, Quentin Matsys, Rombouts, Rubens, A. Vandyk, Schut, Seghers, Van Oort, David Teniers, Neefs, Jordaens, and Crayer. Out of these traditions have grown up a love of pictures, that pervades all classes of the inhabitants; and it is by no means rare to discover choice specimens of the Dutch and Flemish schools in

some of the poorest houses. The amateur-collections of Antwerp, accessible to visitors, are numerous;* and there are many single pictures of great value in private hands, which strangers are not permitted to see.†

The passion for art seems to keep the people in their houses, to shed a consequent dulness over the out-of-door life, and to extinguish the desire for amusement. There is a handsome theatre in Antwerp, embellished with excellent taste and at considerable cost, but nobody goes to it, and it is closed more than half the year. The place is, in this respect, like a temple dedicated to high Art; and the inhabitants move about scantily and silently, as if they were conscious of sacred ground, and afraid to disturb its solemnity.

* The chief collections are in the houses of the late M. le Baron de Pret, Rue Kipdorp, — M. Wuyts, Rue du Jardin,—Madame Ullens, Rue de l'Empereur,—M. Baillie, Longue rue Neuve,—Madame Stevens, Rue de la Place Verte,—M. Verhaegen, Veille Bourse,—M. Weber, Marché St. Jacques,—M. Van Camp, Rue d'Hoboken,—and M. Serigiers, Rue du Couvent.

† A book published in Brussels a few years ago, gives a list of the principal: a Rubens and a Teniers, said to be fine specimens, belonging to M. Boschaert, Rue d'Arenberg; a Rubens, of still greater value, in the hands of the Demoiselles Knyff, Longue rue Neuve; a Jordaens, at the house of Mde de Pret-Thuret, Place de Mer; two Vandykes, belonging to M. Stiers, Rue de l'Hôpital; a Guido belonging to M. Marsily; and several Jordaens' in the house of M. Dubois, Place de Mer.

II.

MALINES.—BRUGES.

A FLAT country, diversified by farm-houses, stretches of mangel-wurzel, turnip-crops, potato-fields and orchards, lies between Antwerp and Malines. The same everywhere —not a hill to be seen; dusty hedge-rows, interminable avenues of Lombardy poplars, and highly-cultivated farms, as level on the surface and as green as a billiard-table. The sameness is a little broken by a peep at the ruins of the country-house of Rubens, on an eminence near Eckeren, but it is a mere scrap of a wall, and derives its sole interest from association. At Westmalle, you come upon a convent of Trappists, which is open to the public, a slight inconsistency in an institution professing to shut itself up in an oblivion of intercourse. Whoever is curious to see a company of live Trappists, ought to visit this establishment, where he will find the austere regulations of Saint Bruno carried out with the utmost rigour. The traveller may whisper in the ear of the porter upon entering, but in the interior speech is interdicted. He will here have the satisfaction of seeing six-and-thirty monks, dressed in coarse sack-cloth, confined round the waist by a rope, without a shred of linen beneath. Agreeably to the stern rules of the order, they shave their heads and let their

beards grow, sleep upon naked boards, and live upon an unvarying diet of bread, sour milk and vegetables; all other nourishing resources, animal food, fish, even eggs and fresh butter are forbidden. They maintain an absolute silence, and from the moment they enter the convent till the moment of their death, they never utter a single word. If anybody ventures to address one of them, he will instantly cover his head with his cowl, and move away. These dumb monks are indefatigable agriculturists; and their sole occupation consists in grubbing up the heath, and digging their graves.

Malines has undergone a surprising change within a few years. The quiet track, with its well-remembered simple obelisk and station-house, has disappeared. Vast buildings rise on all sides; hundreds of railway carriages are collected in open yards, laid out expressly for the purpose; several lines of road, intersecting each other, designate the great continental routes to the sea, to Holland, France and the Rhine; the level and exposed country is no longer visible; the stillness of antique lace-making Mechlin is at an end; and the place is given up to tall chimneys, huge warehouses, officers on duty parading the ground in their uniforms, the shrieks of arriving and departing engines, not unlike the fierce neighing of horses eager for the road or the stable, and the clamorous din of passengers to and from all points of the compass. The change is significant of the improvement which has passed over the face of the kingdom within the last ten or twelve years. Malines is the centre of the railroad system of Belgium, a fact which is forcibly impressed upon the memory of the tourist by the harassing delays he suffers here in waiting for the

arrival of trains; and, until the country can afford to lay down double lines, passengers must make up their minds to wait. Such a consummation is not to be anticipated under existing circumstances. The Belgian railroads are admirably conducted, but for the most part unprofitable; and if they were not concentrated in the hands of government, so that the traffic on the more frequented lines goes to balance the loss on others, travellers would be exposed to worse inconveniences than that of waiting for trains. In some places they would assuredly have no trains to wait for; so let them be thankful for a spare hour or two to cross the fields, and pay a flying visit to the old cathedral of St. Rumbold.

This piece of Gothic magnificence, whose foundations were laid upwards of seven hundred years ago, is of vast extent. The columns of the nave are decorated mid-way with colossal figures, which would hurt the simple grandeur of the *ensemble*, but that the magnitude of the building tones down these bold interpolations. The choir, the altar, and the surrounding embellishments are in the purest taste; here there is little to break the flowing outline of the architecture. The "Crucifixion," by Vandyk, is the grand attraction of the cathedral, a picture that at once suggests a reminiscence of the same subject as it is treated by Rubens. The comparison is favourable to the poetical feeling of Vandyk. His back-ground and sky throw out his figures more effectively, and the distribution of his crosses is more picturesque. By this judicious arrangement, he exhibits in strong relief the harrowing struggles of the thieves, contrasted with the serene endurance of the Saviour, which falls like a soft

light from heaven between them; the subdued colouring of the whole harmonising with the solemn character of the subject. The points of resemblance between these works are no less striking than their differences; such are the two heads gazing upwards from the back-ground upon the cross, the centurion looking up from his horse, the saddle of which he clutches with both hands (coincidences, by the way, which are very remarkable), and the attitude of the Magdalen.

The carved pulpit of this church, representing the Conversion of St. Paul, is a master-piece of art. The attitude of the saint thrown off his horse, is strained; in such a situation the figure of a man would be more huddled; but the fallen horse, struck back upon his haunches, with his fore-legs sinking under him, is wonderfully beautiful, with the exception of the head, which is short and thick. The mouth and nostrils are expanded in the violent effort to recover the ground, and had they been more fine and delicate, the production would have been perfect. But these artists had no notion of the ideal in horses, and made faithful copies of their huge Flemish originals. The crucifixion, surmounting one side of the pulpit, and the figures of the two Marys, are nobly conceived; and great power of handling is shown in the dishevelled mane of the horse, the rock, fruit, foliage, and draperies.

Ascending the tower of St. Rumbold, which is always building and never to be finished, you are introduced to the mysteries of the skeleton clock, whose dial-plate is reflected in the stones of the square below, and may witness the performance of the *carillons*, whose mellow music, falling, as it were from the clouds, through the

tranquil air of evening, so often enchants the traveller in Belgium. The *carillons* play every quarter of an hour, by means of machinery shut up in the tower; but upon grand occasions, popular tunes and still more elaborate compositions are performed by a man who sits at an instrument resembling an organ, with keys and pedals. The wires communicate with the hammers of the bells, and touch, in their action, the points of a huge cylinder, which revolves like the barrel of a musical snuff-box. The effect of the reverberation within the tower is perfectly stunning. At first you expect nothing less than that the whole building will be rent from its foundations, but after a few violent shocks the ear grows accustomed to the uproar. It is only at a distance, however, that the sound becomes reduced and softened into a strain of melody. The physical labour of the man who controls all this thunder with his hands and feet, is so severe as to throw even the looker-on into a sympathetic heat.

The view from the summit of the tower opens a panorama of the flattest country in the world, not the least interesting object in which is the town beneath. Malines is called, with justice, Malines *la propre*. The remarkable cleanliness of the streets; the quaint roofs, and eaves, and porches, relieved here and there by green alleys, patches of gardens, and shrubberies buried in the heart of the buildings; and the dim relics of ancient houses which this downward gaze into the mysteries of the town develops, present altogether a striking and characteristic picture.

There is nothing more to be seen here except "The Miraculous Draught of Fishes," by Rubens, in the Church of Nôtre-Dame, a specimen of colouring which is con-

sidered by good judges to rival the excellence of the Venetian school. How that matter of colouring may be, I will not venture to speculate on; but the grouping is terribly confused, and looks as if the artist had a large design in his head, and, trying to squeeze it into an inadequate space, crushed up his figures, at a serious risk of dislocating their arms and legs.

Glancing off from Malines, you may run to any point you choose in a few hours—Ghent, Liege, Louvain, Tirlemont, Brussels, Bruges. Belgium is covered with lines of railroad, which enable you to traverse the entire country in a few days. If you want to see Flemish life you must get into the towns; for the open champaign is the same everywhere, —lines of foliage, fields spattered with willows, homesteads such as we see in the remote pastoral districts of England, all very rural and encouraging, but obstinately tame and monotonous.

Away, then, from the broad lands, where all is dull and uniform, to the towns where all is strange, and where the habits and costumes of by-gone times may yet be seen moving athwart the sunshine. Away from the interminable roads, with their paved causeways, their funereal rows of trees, their sad neighbourhoods of mangel-wurzel and beet-root, and their long perspectives of white light, broken at intervals by parallel shadows; away to the cities where the hum of trade, the sounds of revel, the religious processions, the peculiar fashions, and the light melancholy notes of the *carillons*, sighing through the clouds, fill the imagination with romantic dreams about old Flanders. Peep into the drowsy streets of Bruges, once the great *depôt* of European merchandise, and the central link of

the chain of communication between Italy and the Hanseatic towns; what fantastic architecture encloses you on all sides,—what grotesque façades,—what odd gables and housetops, surcharged with ornaments,—what pictorial figures clustering in the market-place, and on the open thresholds, making lace as fast as their fingers can run, and singing and chattering in pure excess of glee,—what varieties of costumes, caps like coronals of stars, cloaks falling gracefully over the shoulders, with gossamer fringes fluttering in the air, kerchiefs pinned by the hand of exuberant fancy, and colours to no end! Standing in these antique streets, the stranger confidently expects to see some proud beauty, in a velvet hood and embroidered petticoat, emerge from one of the low, dark, arched doorways, with a falcon on her wrist, and her train held up by a page; and when the *carillon* drops down the wind at mid-day from the tower of the Halles, he listens for the tramp of a company of foot-soldiers coming to relieve guard, and is miserably disappointed to find the modern bayonet in place of the tall, glittering halbert; or, if he be loitering in the aisles of St. Sauveur, he will glance every now and then towards the choir, and fancy that he sees issuing out into the nave the king-at-arms, and a train of knights of the Golden Fleece, in their grand collars and robes, and their mantles and hoods of crimson and white, sprinkled over with gold.

Bruges is a charming bit of antiquity, as still as a dream, and full of old houses, with stepped roofs, chimneys standing in and out, and tossing about their queer caps, as if they wanted to puzzle the smoke, carved and painted screens, and ancient lattice-windows, through which you

look for the realisation of interiors such as you are familiar with in the pictures of Ostade.

In passing through these places, and writing about them, one's thoughts are always running upon pictures, and statues, and carvings, and out-of-the-way styles of architecture. The fact is, there is little else to be seen or thought of. A tour through Belgium is literally an art-tour. The most spiritual and enjoyable part of the pleasure is to explore the cathedrals and museums, to turn over illuminated missals and illegible manuscripts, to criticise paintings, and find out in what particulars the painters who knew nothing about anatomy or perspective laid the foundations of the glory of those who came after them, to wonder at fine saints, and virgins dressed in lace and tinfoil, and to undergo much astonishment at the marriage of pure taste and vulgar glitter, which we find consummated so often in such scenes.

Dropping these hints, like seeds cast upon the wind to be blown away, or take root as they may, we will now run up to Brussels, for we shall observe no geographical order in visiting these Belgian towns.

III.

BRUSSELS AND ITS REVOLUTION.

Most of the approaches to Brussels lie through avenues of beech, elm, and maple-trees, broken by snatches of cultivated grounds and scattered villages. In the environs there is not much of the bustle which usually announces the proximity of a capital; but as you get near the city, and begin to see it stretching up a little hill, with its clouds of smoke and dust whirled into the air, a sense of the comparative magnitude of this very small miniature of Paris gradually takes possession of you. If Brussels is not a very grand or a very lively place, the upper, or new town, is at least handsome and airy, dazzlingly white, and subject to the fashionable vicissitudes of being either blisteringly hot, or as cold as the interior of a gap in the Mer de Glace.

The first peculiarity that strikes the visitor (supposing him to come here in the summer or autumn) is the uncommon quantity of dust which finds its way into his eyes. I had no suspicion of the wonderful capaciousness of my eyes till I found myself toiling up the Boulevards of Brussels. The soil is so light in the neighbourhood that the dust rises in stormy volumes, and covers the tillage in all directions. The sides of the roads are many inches

deep in powder, which is caught up by every breath of wind, and whisked round your head and into your eyes with a violence and rapidity against which nothing less than a pair of Alpine spectacles can efficiently protect you. You cannot walk a dozen yards till your boots become as white as if they had been industriously steeped in flour,—a peculiarity productive of some odd effects in the promenades, especially in the broad walks of the umbrageous park, where you are literally buried ankle-deep in dust.

The aspect of the city from the Bruges road is striking, throwing up from the base to the summit of the hill a variety of spires, flags, dark turrets, and coloured roofs. The old town lies at the foot of the hill on the margin of the river, and here you are smothered in narrow, dingy, and crowded passages; but the streets widen as you ascend, more air is let in upon the scene, the aspect of the houses and the people grows newer and brighter, and by the time you find yourself in the Place Royale, you begin to feel that tone of quietude and elegance which presides over the court quarter of a capital city. Having brought the reader to this point, I will now leave him to Mr. Murray's excellent hand-book, confining myself exclusively to matters of personal observation. Every stone in Brussels is as well known as the dome of St. Paul's; and that tourist must have considerable confidence in his power of imparting novelty to familiar subjects who should attempt at this time of day any fresh descriptions of the carved pulpit of St. Gudule, the pretty Jardin Botanique, the Museum, or even the Etablissement Géographique, where you are received by M. Vandermaelin, the munificent founder of the institution, in a blue smock-

frock, with a pair of compasses or a pruning-knife in his hand, absorbed over head and ears in globes, diagrams, and cacti.

It is the anniversary of the Revolution; but if you expect to find it celebrated here with that universal outpouring of rampant enthusiasm by which such commemorations are distinguished in France, you will be disappointed. There are multitudes of people abroad; but they exhibit no tokens of a strong national feeling. It is nothing more than a great gathering and quiet promenading. The crowds that move up and down through the streets and the park, and out in the direction of the Jardin Botanique, appear to be actuated rather by a curiosity to see what is going forward, than by a consciousness of having any part in the spectacle themselves. There never was so orderly a rejoicing over the liberties of a country. But these are only the *bourgeoisie*. No doubt we shall have a clamorous display of festivity amongst the lower orders in the approaching contests for prizes, which are to be struggled for by racers in sacks, toxophilites, and other dexterous and agile candidates. So let us go outside the Boulevards into the fields and open grounds of Leopoldstadt. Why, one can hardly believe one's senses at this still more remarkable phase of Belgian indifference. The mob are not half so numerous, and are, if possible, even more tranquil than the citizens. Nobody is present except the persons engaged in the diversions, and a thin scattering of lazy spectators. The *people* take no interest whatever in the anniversary, which passes off more quietly than an ordinary holiday. There is even a sort of reserve and backwardness in the enjoyment of the crowd, which

looks less like pleasure than imperfect satisfaction. Yet the town is full of loungers; and if nobody else reaps advantage from the *fête* of the Revolution, the hotel-keepers at least have no reason to complain.

The temper which thus invariably marks the annual return of the glorious days of September is a significant evidence of the fact that the benefits anticipated from the breaking up of the united government of the Netherlands have not been so rapid or substantial as the mass of the people expected. A glance at the origin and immediate consequences of the Revolution will show how and why it is that the Belgians walk through this pageant of their independence with such leisurely apathy.

It was a part of the policy of that good king William who, nearly twenty years ago, ruled over the Low Countries, to possess himself of shares in the principal commercial and manufacturing establishments of the kingdom. Wherever a great firm carried on a flourishing trade, it might be calculated upon with certainty that his Majesty was a sleeping partner. He may have had some such object in view as that which Pitt contemplated in the extension of the National Debt, by rendering the trading community dependent upon the Government, and thereby giving them a direct interest in its stability. But it was an awkward incident in this kingly commercial system, that it threw an undue influence into a particular quarter, which, according to all recognised constitutional theories, ought not to "make or meddle" with the operations of trade. The advantages which his Majesty derived as a private individual from his connection with particular houses was supposed to have given a bias, more or less, to the financial

measures of his cabinet. It could hardly be otherwise. If a choice of alternatives were to be made, it was not very likely to be made to the prejudice of his Majesty's personal fortunes; so that while his Majesty's system secured the support of the mercantile body, it depressed the interests, and outraged the allegiance, of all other classes.

Here were clearly developed the germs of popular discontent. Then came revolutionary doctrines, generated by other causes, worked by other agencies, and already triumphant in France. The consequences were immediate and decisive; an unholy alliance was formed between the clergy and the mob; the revolution was effected like a stroke of magic; King William was dismissed to his Dutch flats, and Leopold elevated to the throne of Flanders. Now note the results.

The suddenness of the movement took the sedate commercial people by surprise; it scared them in their counting-houses; shut up their markets, and arrested their transactions. The old trade was extinguished in a moment, and a new one had to be created. Ruin stared in upon them through every loop-hole of their business. But what could they do? They had no soldiers at their command; they could not get up an armament of quills and inkhorns, and they were obliged to submit. In the meanwhile the transition was completed, and Belgium was erected into a separate kingdom before they could even form a plan of communication amongst themselves.

The mass of the manufacturers, merchants, and traders, were thus on the instant divorced from the Government. The priests and the populace had obtained the ascendancy, and the classes which had been hitherto fostered by legis-

lative enactments, and which had contributed so effectively to the national security, were cast on the strand, like a wreck in a storm. The result was, that the whole of the commercial interest became openly and uncompromisingly opposed to the new order of things, and King Leopold had much reason to consider himself more fortunate than most monarchs of accident, that the very revolutionists who had raised him to power, did not themselves waver during this terrible crisis. The great manufacturing towns, of which Liege and Ghent are the most important, were dismayed at the change; and Antwerp, the capital of Dutch Brabant, which Napoleon intended to make the central point of European maritime operations, was emptied of its trade. The new *entrepôt*, built after the revolution, in consequence of the destruction of the old one by the shells of Chassée, became a splendid monument of mercantile desolation overlooking the empty basins of Bonaparte; the Scheldt did not exhibit a single mast as far as the eye could trace its windings from the lofty galleries of the cathedral; and the few merchants that yet lingered within the walls of the town, made early preparations to remove to Amsterdam, whither the most eminent members of their body had been drawn at the first outbreak by the crafty policy of King William. The commerce of Holland flourished, while that of Belgium was completely broken down. With all the facilities which the country possessed for the encouragement of manufacturing industry, the want of marts, the most valuable and available of which had been closed by the war with Holland, paralysed the energies of the people. In the fever of new-born freedom, these considerations were overlooked; but the fever rapidly abated, and it soon

became evident that the prospects of the nation could no longer be regarded with safety through the medium of a dazzling sentiment. The Belgians were compelled to take a more practical view of their situation. The military force for the most part was composed of raw undisciplined levies, and their means of resisting foreign aggression were so slight, as to leave them at the mercy of any convulsion which might take place in a neighbouring State. To depend for their security, like the small German States, upon the preservation of the balance of power, was a delusion. It was true that Belgium was in its infancy, and that the Government had not yet had time to mature its plans; but the danger lay not in the unwillingness of the Government to restore prosperity, but in the perplexities which beset the attempt.

A strong party existed in favour of the Prince of Orange, even amongst those who stood out most lustily against his father, and in favour of separation. This was an element of discord which, for a long time, menaced the throne of Leopold. The club-houses in Ghent were filled with rioters, and hardly a day passed that was not marked by a duel. All sorts of fancy articles, jewellery, and bonbons, were fabricated with ingenious devices in allusion to the Prince of Orange; and, although the feeling was not openly avowed, its existence was well known throughout the country. It might be considered strange that it did not take a more express and formidable shape, and make itself known and felt through the public journals; but it must be remembered that the press, nominally free, is really very feeble and contemptible in this country, and does not attempt to represent or protect public opinion. It is a mere

reprint of news, exhibits scarcely any original commentary, and is utterly powerless and unavailable as a political organ. The attachment of the middle and industrial classes to the Prince of Orange was attested, however, by many trifling indications, which were sufficiently intelligible to make it imperative upon Government to suppress its display. The palace of the prince used to be shown to the public at first; its gorgeous apartments were all thrown open, including the boudoir and toilette of the Princess, just as she had left them when she fled from Brussels. Now, if the Revolution had really carried with it the heart of the people, this exhibition would have stimulated their enthusiasm; but it had exactly the contrary effect, and the Government at last considered it prudent to close up the private apartments altogether. The palace still continued to be shown, but no longer with the same pomp and circumstances. The blinds of the windows were drawn down, so as to darken the rooms, and show the pictures and articles of *vertu* at the greatest possible disadvantage, and visitors were hurried through the apartments so rapidly, that the impression left upon their minds was necessarily slight and fugitive. In fact, everything was done to disappoint the sympathy and curiosity of the people, and to keep the prince out of view as much as possible.

Nobody could blame King Leopold for having recourse to such expedients. He was so deeply impressed with the hostility of the manufacturing interest, that upon his annual visits to Ostend in the bathing season he used to make a circuitous route by way of Audenard, in order to avoid Ghent, where the Orange party was very strong. This in itself was a conclusive proof not only of the state

of opinion, but of the king's knowledge and dread of it. A still more galling humiliation was forced upon him by the presence of the guard-ship at the mouth of the Scheldt. The queen's pleasure-yacht always lies at Antwerp; and when her Majesty goes to Ostend, it is customary to send her yacht to that port, under charge of a frigate of war; but as the frigate could not pass out of the Scheldt, no other course was left but to drag it through the canal of Ghent. Imagine the degrading spectacle of a frigate of war, with its proper proportion of officers and sailors on board, drawn by horses through a canal for a distance of some eighty or ninety miles, where it had scarcely room to float, and all in order to avoid collision with a repudiated power, which overawed the country on the brink of its own shores.

Such memories as these are not calculated to inspire the people with much ardour on the revolutionary anniversary. If they have subsequently, and only latterly, risen up out of the depression, and recovered their elasticity, it is not in consequence, but in spite of the Revolution. They struggled manfully through long years of privation and difficulty, and are now enjoying the prosperity which they have conquered by the force of their invincible energy. The railroads have done, and are doing, wonders for Belgium; carried their trade up to the Rhenish provinces, and opened on all sides important facilities to their commerce. The whole country is improved. The people look as if they had something to work for at last. They are industrious and economical, and, which helps them on still better, cheerful and resolute. There are no longer any complaints about want of business; their great

ambition is to become "a little England," and if they advance for the next ten years as they have done for the last five (making allowances for fluctuation) they will realise their desire. It is rather a hazardous speculation to cast the nativities of nations in these times; but the world ought not to be surprised if Belgium should one day become a master-power in Europe. She has immense capabilities. Her geographical position is commanding, her soil fertile, and her climate favourable; she possesses ample watercourses and harbours; the cultivation of the surface is unimpeded by mountains or barren tracts; and her population are enterprising and laborious; a combination of elements which, if steadily worked, and left undisturbed by the revolutionary action of surrounding nations, may be reasonably expected to crown the industrial efforts of the people with solid success.

IV.

THE CONSTITUTION AND THE KING.

In Belgium everything is elective. The only difference between the Senate, or Upper House, and the Lower Chamber, is, that the landed qualification is higher, and the term of duration longer, in the former than in the latter. But they are both elected, the Senate for ten years, the Lower Chamber for five. It is a distinction without any real difference. The Senate interposes no check or corrective influence; it represents no class or interest. It sits, apparently by way of a sort of state ceremony, with its sublime arms folded. For all practical constitutional purposes it possesses hardly any power, and exercises none. It has neither political nor social weight. Any person who enjoys the requisite qualification in land or property is eligible to the Senate; hence we find merchants and even shop-keepers amongst its members, mixing up with the descendants of the old nobility. The aristocratic element goes for nothing. Any individual who has made money enough to purchase the requisite estate may shoulder out the finest count of them all. The working of the system has the effect of stamping the Senate with a *parvenu* character, and bringing it into such contempt with the upper and educated classes that men

of high talent and ambitious views take great pains to avoid being elected into it, by studiously keeping their landed investments below the standard of qualification.

The Lower House, to all intents and purposes, governs the country. Its authoritative power is so openly recognised, that it is here the king opens the Parliament. The Senate has the nominal right of refusing its assent to the legislative measures of the other Chamber. So has the king. But it is almost a constitutional fiction, for the right is so rarely used that it has no weight whatever on the action of the legislature. The government is essentially democratic in everything except the form. There is no government in Europe so purely representative. Every man who pays a small contribution to the state (so small as to exclude nobody except the pauper) has a voice in the elections; and the representatives thus elected virtually control the other estates. In practice, a more perfect system of government by representation could not be devised. The king has the power of declaring war—a power which in the circumstances of Belgium he is not very likely to exert; and he is consequently wanted for nothing but his signature to state-papers. As it is, he spends half his year out of Belgium—in France, Germany, England, anywhere except in Belgium, which does not seem to agree with him. This is, no doubt, the wisest course he can take; for if he were a man of action, and happened to run counter to popular prejudices, he might find his seat rather uneasy. The *insouciance* with which he has contrived to rule this busy little country, and to keep it together amidst the shock of political earthquakes which have produced such convulsions on its

French and Prussian frontiers (fearful as the experiment would have been elsewhere, especially just after a revolution), has answered the purpose admirably. Indeed it has answered the purpose a thousand times better than the most adroit management. It has suffered the real nature of the Belgium constitution to develop itself, and to show how wonderfully it can get on without any other help from a king than the endorsement of his name. In no other sense is Leopold king of that country.

The old families and the commercial classes were long and bitterly opposed to his government, but they have become gradually reconciled to him by the total negation of all antagonism in his character and conduct. He is universally respected for his "good intentions," his *bonhommie* (a small supply of which goes a great way with a king), his quiet courage, and his known desire to advance the happiness of the people. Nobody thought, even in the worst times, of blaming Leopold for anything. It was felt that he was thrown by accident into an invidious position, and the animosities of party were directed chiefly against his advisers. I had a conversation, during the period when the Orange faction was at its height, with a merchant of Liege, who made this matter clear. "Leopold," he observed, "was made king by the priests and the *canaille;* he is not the king of the thinking classes; but nobody objects to Leopold personally. He is a good man, and a sensible man, and would make an excellent king, under better auspices. If he is unpopular with us, it is not on his own account, but on account of the change which brought him into power. It is true he does no good; but he does no harm—he

does nothing. I had an interview with him on mercantile affairs, which lasted for eight hours. He is accessible to everybody—but *he does nothing for anybody.* He is a clever man, and knows everything—but *he does nothing.* He speaks German, French, Flemish, and English; he is affable, amiable, and reasonable; the people do not express disapprobation of him, because he gives no occasion—*he does nothing.* That is the secret of his security. We all feel that the priests rule the country, and that the king is only a puppet in their hands. They pull the wires, and the king moves. Should any change take place, he will be treated with respect and forbearance, for it will be remembered from the highest to the lowest, that if he did no good during his reign, he did no evil—that, in fact, *he did nothing.*"

Circumstances have undergone much alteration since that time; but the material truth is still the same. The industry of the people is living down the influence of the priests; but the priests still wield too large a power, and the king is still a cypher.

V.

THE GLOVE OF FLANDERS.

CHARLES V.'s pun upon Ghent, or Gant, is a standing joke in Belgium. In his time it was one of the wealthiest cities in Europe, and so large and populous that he used to indulge in the pleasantry of saying that he could put all Paris into his glove (*gant*); and on another occasion, when the sanguinary Alva urged him to destroy the town by way of punishing the insubordination of the inhabitants, his majesty took the "cruel duke" to the top of the old *beffroi*, and making him look down upon the outspread city beneath, asked him "Combien il falloit de peaux d'Espagne pour un *gant* de cette grandeur?" This imperial *calembourg* has given currency to the supposition that the name of the city originated in some passage of ancient chivalry, and was literally derived from a glove. But this is an error. The name is Flemish, and is traced in the old chronicles to the Vandals, who taking the place from the Goths, called it Wanda, whence by an easy transition we get Ganda, abbreviated in course of time into Gand, and finally Frenchified into Ghent.

Miraculous accounts of the antiquity of Ghent are supplied by the Flemish historians; but no respectable

proofs can be adduced of its existence earlier than the seventh or eighth century. It was formerly the capital of Flanders; it is now the capital of Eastern Flanders. It was formerly a rich and thriving place; it is now the principal manufacturing town of Belgium. Here the Knights of the Golden Fleece once held their chapters; and here in later times a fleece of more substantial gold has been conjured out of the cotton manufacture. Kings and princes, and emperors, and brave republican merchants have held sway in Ghent through the pomp of courts and the blood of revolutions. Great men have left their names here in houses and public places, where their memories are still preserved: Charlemagne and the Arteveldes, Philip the Good, Charles V., Napoleon. Louis XVIII. took refuge here when he was driven out of Paris in 1815; the Duke of Wellington occupied a house opposite to him; the Duc de Berri was lodged at the little Hôtel des Pays-Bas; and all the sovereigns of Europe, during that famous three months, while Ghent enjoyed the temporary honour of entertaining royalty, sent their ambassadors to do suit and service at the court of the banished monarch. Strange fluctuations has Ghent seen since those days. During and after the Revolution, the most Orange of all the Orange cities of Belgium, it lost its trade and menaced the new order of things by daily riots and *émeutes*. But when the first fiery outbreaks were over, the resisting spirit gradually subsided into tranquillity; the Place d'Armes relapsed into a promenade and book-fair; the club-houses, no longer the scene of wild party strife, were once more given up to dominoes and coffee; the name of King William was quietly effaced from the façade of the university; and

merchants and manufacturers, glove-makers and lace-makers, and the new playhouse, whose saloons are the handsomest in Europe, began to brighten and look forward to prosperous times.

At the present moment the trade of Ghent, which has derived immense facilities from the railroads, is rapidly improving; and so long as trade flourishes there is little risk of disturbances in these conservative towns. The Belgians may be depended upon for the preservation of order under a system of government which encourages and protects industry. In this matter they are quite as practical as the English, without having our constitutional safety-valve—the habit of grumbling.

Intersected by numerous canals, and the wandering

branches of two rivers, spanned by countless bridges of wood and stone; charged in its old market places, narrow

streets, and bustling quays with quaint and picturesque architecture, of which an ancient Gothic house on the grand canal, crusted over with ornaments, affords a characteristic specimen; challenging your attention at every turn with historical sites and ruins, two of the most remarkable being the turreted gateway where *our* John of Gaunt was born, and the ancient belfry or watch-tower, which was at once a monument of the power of the Gantois, and the tocsin of their security, from whence they rang out the alarum that upon occasions of danger called the citizens together, Ghent contains more objects likely to interest the stranger than any other town in Belgium. A few days may be agreeably and profitably spent in its streets, in exploring its well-furnished shops, markets and manufactories, and in visiting the hospitals and religious houses, the Casino, and the Botanical gardens.

The churches are numerous, and two or three of them superb. The churches are the manifest glory of the Flemish towns. They are not only attractive from their architectural beauty, their pomp, and their endless incentives to religious enthusiasm, but they draw in, as to a common centre, all that is curious and peculiar in costume, usage, and character. Open all day long, they receive communicants from sunrise till the close of vespers; and there, in the little chapels that nestle in the aisles, with their altars and images reposing in the flitting shadows, you discover the most picturesque groups absorbed in prayer. The sight is impressive. Let us linger for a moment behind this pillar. It is the cathedral church of St. Bovan, the marvel of Ghent. As you look

up the nave you suppress your breath. The scene is transcendantly grand. On every side you are surrounded by marble statues; and the whole of the interior is lined with black marble, relieved at intervals with graceful scrolls and white columns of Parian purity and delicacy. There are twenty-two chapels within the walls; the altars are alternately composed of gold, silver, and marble. Verde antique, porphyry, and scagliola, are scattered about as profusely as so much whitewash or tinsel. The rarest paintings and the most elaborate sculpture teem upon you from every point of vision. It would seem as if the treasures of Sardanapalus and Cleopatra had been poured into this costly temple. Hush! in the dim distance, rendered more distant by the splendours which distract the eye in the intervening space, there is a gathering of children coming up the nave in solemn procession. They are dressed in white, with lace veils that fall over their faces like dropping clouds. They carry in their hands vases and baskets of artificial flowers, which they strew over the ground as they advance towards the altar. Now they take their seats close to the choir—the organ peals out a low, deep, full volume of sound, and fills the air with music; a ceremony, mystical to us, is performing, and now they place their offerings at the foot of the altar, and deposit their mites upon the silver plates presented to them by the priests. It is the anniversary of a charity for the sick of the city, and these children are the ministers of that twice-blessed benevolence. The service is over, and they resume their procession as before, returning in the same order, and strewing the ground with flowers. How sweetly this meek goodness contrasts with

the gorgeousness of the edifice in which it is displayed! The earnestness and stedfastness of Catholicism is rendered intelligible through such scenes. There are so many motives to urge these people into the temples of their religion, so many lights and helps to spiritual enthusiasm in the pictorial parables and sculptured histories which these walls exhibit, that we cannot wonder if the heart of the devotee should throb with emotion, and sink down into uninquiring worship before the mixed influences which appeal so eloquently to his imagination. We say truly that the Catholic religion is addressed to the senses of the multitude; that it reposes upon the credulity of nature, and trusts to faith the convictions which belong to the province of reason. But is it certain that reason always moves the affections of the poor and ignorant? Be the issues what they may—superstition, fanaticism, and blind obedience—the fidelity and devotion of the lower classes are, at least, effectually secured by the gorgeous forms and open communion of the Catholic Church.

VI.

THE BEGUIN.

The Beguinage is a convent of nuns who voluntarily dedicate themselves to prayer and acts of charity. It occupies an island in Ghent, is almost a small town in itself, has little silent streets, and a large ancient chapel of its own, is surrounded by a fosse, and entered across a drawbridge through a massive old gateway. The transition is felt in a moment from the noisy clattering pavement you have just left, to the tranquil and solitary place you have entered, where a distant footfall, or a solitary figure gliding in the shadow of the wall are incidents to attract attention. The best time for seeing the Beguinage is at the hour of vespers, towards the winter, when the dusk has set in, and the chapel in which the nuns assemble is partially lighted.

It was a dark autumnal evening, rather gusty out of doors, when we visited the Beguinage for the first time. The place was so still that the slightest sounds were audible, and we fancied that we could hear the wind moaning through the old gateway as we drove in. Our coachman, however, did not seem to be much impressed with the profound repose of the place, but made it a point to carry us at a dashing pace up to the door of the chapel.

Two or three old pensioners lingered outside the porch, huddled up, listening to the organ, and, now and then, peering into the chapel as the door noiselessly opened to admit the apparition of a solitary nun. The interior was full. There are six hundred nuns in the establishment; their dress is black, with a large white veil which, during the time of their devotions, they wear over their heads, and falling down upon their shoulders. The whole space of the aisles and nave was occupied by these six hundred sisters, who knelt forward with their heads bowed, and their arms crossed, the uniformity of the attitude heightening the religious severity of the general effect. They were nearly all motionless—hardly a stir or palpitation amongst that vast assembly; and as the faint lights from side walls and columns fell slantingly upon their sheeted forms, they looked like rows of white tombs, touched here and there by a dull moonlight. Old sisters with lanterns went glancing to and fro amongst the Beguins, and came occasionally towards the altar to collect contributions from the few strangers, chiefly English, who were gathered there; and the organ loft was filled with novices, wearing chaplets on their heads, like sacrificial virgins about to perform some solemn rite. Amongst the nuns there were some whose faces, whenever they permitted us to have a glimpse of them, appeared to be singularly fair and placid, and full of a benign rebuke to that outer world of thoughtlessness and gaiety from which we had just parted, and which we were so soon to rejoin. People look at these things differently, and under different influences; but the deep tranquillity of life in this retirement, its unvarying round of devotional offices and charitable labours resumed and

discharged day after day with unfailing regularity, whatever we may think of the means by which it is attained, or the uses to which it is dedicated, forces upon the spectator an involuntary contrast with that wayward existence on the open highway of the world, where, racked by imaginary as well as real cares, or abandoned to the pursuit of fugitive pleasures, the bulk of mankind expend their energies and waste their hearts in struggling after shadows.

The next morning we visited the Beguinage again. The aspect of the chapel was more sober and less impressive, but it afforded us a clear view of the actual every-day lives of the sisterhood. Morning and evening it is still the same—the same recurrence to prayer and confession, and the same rigid observance of a fixed division and employment of time. Coming out of the chapel we accosted one of the Beguins, who was just passing us in front of the altar at the breaking up of the service. She put her finger on her lip, and motioning us to keep silence, pointed to the door, indicating that she would speak to us after she had left the chapel. She then turned towards the altar, dropped for a moment on her knees, and having finished her prayer, joined us outside. To our great surprise she addressed us in English, told us she was an Englishwoman, the only one in the order, or that had ever been in it, satisfied our enquiries, which concerned the novices we had seen in the organ-loft, and concluded by inviting us to her residence in the Beguinage, an invitation of which it is hardly necessary to say we gladly availed ourselves.

Everybody who has been in Ghent knows the con-

ventual dwellings which form the outer circle of the island on which the Beguinage is built—small, secluded houses, with neat lattice windows, shut in by a high wall, each house having its own separate entrance, numbered and inscribed with the names of the saints to whom the indwellers are dedicated, or the convents from whence they came. When the little door in this high wall opens, you find yourself in a tiny garden filling the space between the wall and the house, planted with a few shrubs and flowers, scattered off in miniature beds, or a tall thoughtful tree outgrowing the wall, as if it were trying to look over it, and see what was going on outside. Our Beguin had the prettiest speck of garden imaginable, with a fairy ring by way of walk winding round a sort of ball or mound dotted over with blossoms, and edged with white stones, all very modest and bright, and bearing evidence to the careful hands that plucked the morning weeds out of it before the sun came to invigorate them. From the garden we passed into the parlour, not directly, for it did not exactly open upon the fairy walk, but through a passage so narrow that it was but a step into the room. The daintiest little parlour in all Flanders; just like the queen's chamber in a bee-hive. The room was big enough for a couple of people to dine in, perhaps three might be accommodated by a skilful management of the door and the corners. Everything in it was on the smallest practicable scale, but wonderfully complete. Two little tables covered with baize; a grand glass case on one of them containing figures in wax, artificial flowers, and similar spruce specimens of innocent finery which we did not care particularly to examine, and on the other a hand-

some glass bowl, in which were gambolling about the sprightliest of gold and silver fish. In a cage in the window, bounding madly up and down from perch to perch, was a bright canary which the Beguin assured us sang charmingly, regretting that the bird just then happened to be losing its feathers, which spoiled its music. Several little prints in black and gilt frames hung upon the walls, exclusively religious subjects, such as miracles and martyrdoms, and portraits of popes and confessors, some of them painted in colours, with very blue skies, very red faces, and robes of bright amber, crimson, and green. Dwarf Crucifixions, Virgins, and Ascensions cut out in paper, or carved in wood, or made of wax, and dressed out with bits of ribbon, lace and tinfoil were pinned about in every available nook; and the room altogether looked delightfully clean and cosy, with its nice warm matting, its cheerful curtains, and an English stove. Instead of being gloomy or mean, it had a light and pleasant air, for which it was materially indebted to some creeping plants which dropped into gay festoons outside the window. Close at hand was the kitchen, furnished with an excellent range, and all other necessary means of comfort, constructed on a scale to suit the limited demands of the *ménage*.

The lives of these nuns, notwithstanding their seclusion, or rather in consequence of it, pass away in a course of uninterrupted tranquillity. The exemption from common cares and distractions, the consciousness of always performing strictly the routine of duties and obligations marked out for them, and the ready resource in the confessional (to which they resort weekly) of acquiring renewed

motives for vanquishing any flitting weaknesses or misgivings which may disturb them—all help to render them contented and cheerful, to keep their days in an "even tenor," and to revive their strength in moments of failure and despondency. They rise at half-past four, and go to bed at nine. The intervening hours are engrossed in prayer and good works. Absolved from their relations with society, and having no sorrows of their own, they devote themselves to the alleviation of the sorrows of others. They listen daily to histories of woe and crime; they pity and advise; help the distressed, soothe the afflicted, and watch by the bed-side of the sick and dying. Whatever we may think of some of their articles of faith, their pictures, images, reliques, and penances, we cannot deny that their lives are pure and useful. Their order is peculiar in this respect, that the obligations they undertake are entirely voluntary, and may be relinquished at pleasure. The Beguin may return to the world whenever she chooses, without violating a single vow, or even incurring a reproach. But it is the boast of the sisterhood that no Beguin has ever yet availed herself of the privilege, although the institution has been in existence on this spot upwards of six hundred years.

Our Englishwoman told us her whole story. She had embraced the conventual life against the entreaties of her family. She had literally fallen in love with it, and the impulse was too strong to be resisted. After having spent six years within the walls of the convent, where the observances are strict and austere, she was permitted to come out and live in one of the houses, where, in her domestic habits, she was as much her own mistress as if

she lived in the town. The regulations of these houses are so liberal, that a sister is allowed to have a female relative to reside with her as a companion. Two or three nuns generally live together, but they are perfectly independent of each other, and may form a mess, or keep to their separate apartments if they please. If a Beguin (as we were happy to discover was the case with our cordial friend) happens to possess any private property, she is at liberty to spend it in any way she thinks proper. She may live as luxuriously as she chooses, within the dietary rules of the church, or she may live with rigid economy, and give away her money. In a community of this kind, however, where a sentiment of active piety is paramount over all personal considerations, none will be found to run into any indulgences beyond mere comfort in living; but as there are great differences in the circumstances of the Beguins, some being comparatively rich, and some miserably poor, great differences exist in their dwellings and modes of life. The poor Beguins are allowed to recruit their finances by menial labours; they go out to attend the sick, and are permitted to receive trifling gratuities as nurses; they wash, and get up lace, and otherwise employ their leisure as advantageously as they can. Our Beguin, fortunately, was above all necessity of that sort. She kept her own servant, and evidently enjoyed all the ease and independence consistent with the meekness and charities of her profession.

But to resume her story. After having been many years in the Beguinage, she felt a strong desire to see her friends in England. The regularity with which she had fulfilled her duties appeared to the Supérieure to entitle

her to some indulgence, and, as the Beguins are occasionally suffered to go amongst their friends, she was allowed three weeks to pay her anxious visit to England. But it prescribed, as a strict condition, that for that period she should lay aside her Beguin dress, and appear in the ordinary costume. This was a great trouble to her, although she was commanded by the Supérieure herself to abandon her beloved habit; and she submitted to the penalty with implicit obedience, yet not without many a secret pang. The next embarrassment of the good Beguin was how to get to England. She could not travel alone. What was to be done? Luckily there was a poor Englishwoman living in Ghent, who had an earnest wish to revisit her native country, but who had not the means of defraying the cost of the journey. The Beguin gladly undertook to pay her expenses, and they travelled together. In twelve hours they reached London, where they separated, the Beguin for Birmingham, and the poor woman for some place in the suburbs of town, agreeing to meet again at a certain hour, on a certain day, to return to Belgium.

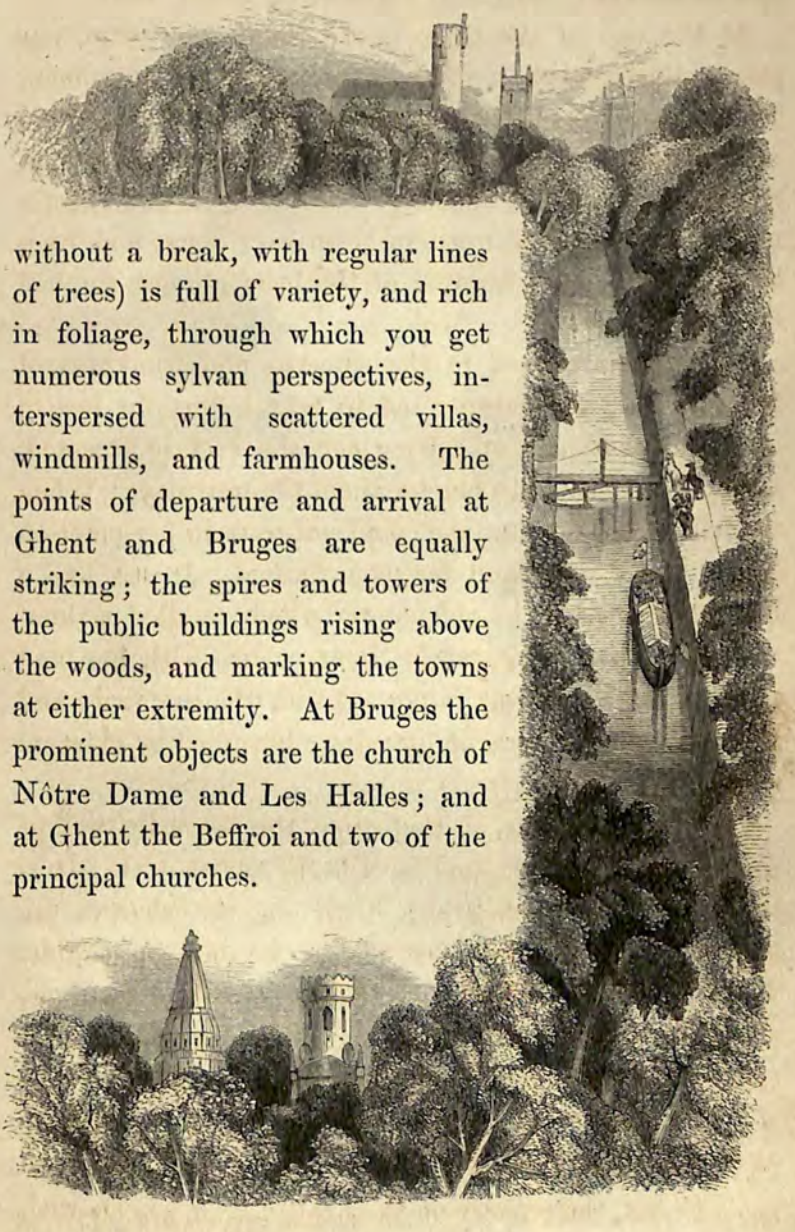
When the Beguin got to her friends at Birmingham, she found their way of life very perplexing at first. Instead of getting up at half-past four, nobody was down to breakfast till ten or eleven. Instead of dinner at twelve—dinner at six. Instead of tea and supper and bed, and all over by nine—tea at nine and bed at twelve or one. For a few days this was very difficult; but her elastic habits of discipline soon enabled her to adapt herself to the new modes; and she became so reconciled to their music and dancing and gaiety, that she could at last laugh

at the goodnatured family joke about the nun that came over to see her friends, and left her veil behind her.

At the end of the three weeks the appointment was punctually kept between the Beguin and the poor woman. They met precisely at the hour and spot agreed upon, and started immediately to retrace their happy journey. On her return the nun resumed her convent dress and Beguin usages, and has continued in them ever since, and likes them all the better because of the brief glimpse she had had of freedom.

We were interested in the sincerity and frankness of her manners, and volunteered to take letters for her to her English friends, an offer which she eagerly accepted, inviting us to come to her for them the next day. When we called the next day, she could not restrain her emotion —her hand shook and her face flushed. It was like a breath of air from the old country which recalled a thousand memories. We sat an hour or two with her, and parted from her deeply impressed with the simplicity and truthfulness of a mode of life so rarely ruffled by external sympathies.

The *trekschuyt* was, at that time, the favourite way of travelling in Belgium, and is still the pleasantest. It is very neatly, even elegantly fitted up, the charges are moderate, and the accommodation is unexceptionable. These light pretty boats, with their colours and awnings, are drawn by horses through the canals; and the great canal of Ghent, as it is called, branching off to Antwerp, Ostend, Dunkirk, and other places, is exceedingly picturesque throughout its course to Bruges. As you leave Ghent, the scenery on the banks (which are planted,



without a break, with regular lines of trees) is full of variety, and rich in foliage, through which you get numerous sylvan perspectives, interspersed with scattered villas, windmills, and farmhouses. The points of departure and arrival at Ghent and Bruges are equally striking; the spires and towers of the public buildings rising above the woods, and marking the towns at either extremity. At Bruges the prominent objects are the church of Nôtre Dame and Les Halles; and at Ghent the Beffroi and two of the principal churches.

VII.

COURTRAI.

Courtrai has been very shabbily treated in the guide-books. To be sure, it lies on the remote and somewhat dismal confines of Belgium, on the way to France, out of the track of tourists, and is celebrated for nothing but its great flax-market, which, in its actual development as a market, interests nobody but buyers and sellers, and the hotel-keepers, who on this busy occasion, which returns every Monday, expand their *table-d'hôtes* to the utmost possible capability of their *salles*. Yet Courtrai has some claims on our attention. It is a very old place, brings out old Flanders revived and perked up for a modern holiday, and enjoys the historical distinction of having witnessed from its ancient ramparts the famous Battle of the Spurs. Seven hundred gold spurs are said to have been taken on the field from the French, and hung up in the Church of Nôtre Dame, from whence, as far as I could learn, they have long since disappeared. Moreover, Courtrai is a wonderfully bright, clean, little town, with some wide streets (and some very narrow ones); two convents; several handsome churches; a few fine houses rearing their grand façades amongst the shops; a terribly old tumble-down *hôtel de ville*, very crazy and dirty, but containing

some stone carvings of great antiquity and rare beauty; a museum with pictures which nobody need be at the trouble to visit unless he finds time hanging fearfully on his hands; and a diminutive park laid out with walks, and trees, and water, and ambuscades with statues in them, and rustic bridges under shadowy willows, and stretches of green sward, apparently never cropped nor swept, with dead leaves and broken boughs lying about in charming disorder.

But the one grand thing which has altogether escaped notice, and which has thus tempted me to invite the reader to an excursion of two minutes to remote Courtrai, is a Vandyk in one of the churches. A stranger would as soon think of looking for a Michel Angelo under a paving-stone as for a Vandyk in Courtrai; yet here is an unmistakable, veritable Crucifixion by that master. His hand is so clearly in it, that you may detect him at a single glance. The figure of the Christ is fine, and the head, and the heads of the figures all about; but, for Vandyk, in whose great pictures there is always an epic sense of repose, a solemn purity of treatment, and lofty grandeur of expression, the composition is more elaborate and crowded than might have been anticipated. For this reason, perhaps, people may have passed by this Vandyk, and thought it a capital picture by some obscure artist, and so left it. Expend a little time over it, and by degrees you will find the figures coming alive out of the canvas, and the various characteristics and modifications of the emotion in each palpably individualised. Still, there is too much effort in it, too many arms straining upwards, too much physical movement; and one cannot

help regretting, notwithstanding the melancholy beauty with which the principal figure is invested, that Vandyk did not more strictly follow the suggestions of his own chaste judgment in a picture which he appears to have entered upon with a bold conception and more than ordinary enthusiasm. No doubt the greatest of his Crucifixions is that at St. Michael's in Ghent, which, defaced and retouched and injured as it is, still retains, like the Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci at Milan, vivid traces of the force, invention, and originality of the master. His genius seems to have reached its happiest achievement in that famous picture, which, spoiled as it has been by bungling attempts at restoration, is not so much spoiled, after all, as Sir Joshua has represented it to be. The amateur will be better able to appreciate its merits by a peep at this other Crucifixion, in which the subject is treated in a different manner, and with greater variety. After he has seen this picture, he will not think that he has thrown away an hour or two in the little excursion by railroad from Ghent to Courtrai.

VIII.

WATERLOO.

The site of a gorgeous temple, the mere earth over which the Grecian squadrons swept, are like unto thee, Marathon of modern Europe! There is nothing left of Waterloo, but that which nothing can destroy—the field where the battle was fought. To be sure, at the foot of the mound (which looks like what it is, a fiction) there stands an impoverished cabin, with an aspect as Irish as if it were squatted on the margin of the bog of Allen; and as you pass its low door two or three squalid children start out upon you with bags and aprons full of buckles, fragments of belts and pouches, and even the wadding of guns, which they coolly tell you were gathered on the ground immediately after the battle. When I first visited Waterloo, I was conducted over the plain by Sergeant-Major Cotton, who had been with the army through that memorable campaign, and could map out its incidents step by step. Being an active and intelligent man, the Sergeant-Major had retired from the service to settle down in the more profitable occupation of guide over this historical scene, a function which he discharged with such soldierly knowledge and veracity that when, at the close of the day, he collected some bones of the slain for one of our

party, who had a taste for such curiosities, and assured us that cart-loads of similar remains might be procured, although twenty years had then elapsed since the battle was fought, we implicitly believed him. The same trade in bones and flattened bullets and other fragments has been carried on ever since, and if you have sufficient credulity, and an easy way of gulping local fabrications, or, as Swift says, believing "the thing that is not," you may imagine yourself standing here surrounded by associations which will put you back some four-and-thirty years of your life, with as much facility as you can put back the hand of the clock. If, however, you refuse to be deluded by this impudent manufacture of reliques, you will see nothing in the whole outspread scene but a monotonous, dead level, hardly relieved by an undulation, and dotted only at great intervals with a few trees that have a heart-broken air of funereal loneliness.

Oh! it was a brave place to fight in! There was "ample room and verge" for horse and foot; and if ever any patriotic poet should put it into an epic he will assuredly make the God of Battles clap on his spurs, and call for his thunder-proof shield, in ecstasy at the sight of so many thousands of human beings brought together in deadly collision on a spot so favourable to mutual destruction. On the surface of the globe, Belgium always excepted, in honour of its unrivalled flats, there is not such another place for waging a great battle. It is the cock-pit of Europe. We may get places quite as level, but then the industry of man has interrupted the view with buildings, or broken up the surface with drains and walls and predial boundaries; now there was literally

nothing to check the headlong gallop of the dragoon, or to turn aside the march of the infantry, on the inviting plain of Waterloo. It is apparently designed by nature to be consecrated to a solemn spectacle of deliberate slaughter.

I have read several descriptions of Waterloo, but never met one that conveyed a just idea of its desolate aspect. The reason why these accounts of Waterloo are false as pictures, is because the writers of them, absorbed by an overwhelming sense of the grandeur of the occasion, could not resist the temptation to exaggerate the features of the scene. Instead of depicting this dreary waste of Waterloo, exactly as it is, they appear to have been carried away by magnificent reminiscences of the overthrow of Napoleon, the restoration of legitimacy, and the glory of England. Leaving these writers to indulge their military raptures, and to pay the honours of war to the grave of armies, let us ascend this hill, which flanks the right wing of the position held by the English when the fight was at the hottest, and we can obtain a panorama of the whole view in a moment or two, without any embellishment from the imagination, or any vain flourishes of nationality.

This hill is called Mont St. Jean, not the Mont St. Jean of 1815, but a spick and span new Mont St. Jean, composed of the soil dug from the ancient mount to cover the bones of the slain of both armies. Upon the summit of this conical hill is erected, on a spacious and lofty pedestal, a huge bronze lion cast from cannon taken at the battle. The ascent is toilsome, and acutely recalls to one's memory Shakspeare's description of the samphire-gatherers on the cliffs of Dover. As we gain the top, the two or three

people who linger in the fields below begin to look like crows, and the scattered cottages are only so many dove-cots. The scene now expands beyond all expectation. Here, under the shadow of the colossal crest of Belgium, let us look out quietly on the chess-board where Wellington and Bonaparte contested the last game of their protracted match.

And a chequered board it is, sterile and parched and melancholy to the rim of the horizon. A vast plain stretches round you in all directions, relieved only by distant patches of trees, two or three dismal houses rising up like solitary land-marks, to help, as it were, the speculations of the eye, the Forest of Soignie, rent by the wood-cutters for firing, and despoiled of its massive depths of foliage, at least on the side which is nearest to us, and the high-road to Namur running through the centre like a well-defined track on a map to show the line of Napoleon's escape, when, in the agony of his heart he exclaimed, *Sauve qui peut!* and fled from the field. There, on the right, is the château of Hougomont buried in the little wood, with its white walls glancing through the leaves, and presenting such a mass of compound architecture as to create some doubt, if we did not know it to be the house of a comfortable *propriétaire*, whether it was a monastery or a farm-house. Away on the other side is La Belle Alliance and La Haye Sainte: but let not the names of these memorable sheds deceive you. La Belle Alliance, with its vacant yard, its ugly gables, and its shapeless walls and roofs, and La Haye Sainte, with its white-washed front, on which certain cannon-shot marks are preserved (in black paint) as palpably to this hour for

the lovers of the marvellous, as if the battle had been fought only last week, are as unpicturesque objects as you could fall in with even in the dullest parts of dull Flanders. It is true that one of these cabins was the last house Napoleon entered before he fled from Waterloo, and that the other was the scene of the meeting between Blucher and Wellington when the day was won; but these associations, however they enhance the historical interest of the spot, abate not a jot of its actual dreariness. Near to these is a plain obelisk to the memory of the German Legion, and at a short distance a fluted column on a plinth with a florid inscription to the glory of Sir Alexander Gordon, whose titles are enumerated in a cloud of words that obscure his last and greatest claim on our sympathies. Between these is Picton's tree, the simplest and most affecting memorial of them all. At its foot Picton received his mortal wound, and died like a soldier in the arms of victory. That lonely and graceful tree, speaking with the tongue of poetry, is more eloquent than the noblest sculpture. Beyond, trembling on the confines of light, like a shadow, is the thicket through which the Prussians came up, pouring unexpectedly on the flank of the French army, and giving, as everybody knows, a decisive turn to the fortunes of the day.

Glance over the whole, from north to south, and from east to west, and you see nothing but an immense barren tract of land, on which a malediction would seem to have fallen, so cold and hopeless a prospect is it to gaze upon. The question naturally suggests itself to the mind whether this great plain is kept in its desolation for show, or whether it is really as unproductive as it appears to be?

But a few snatches of corn-fields just glimmering on the surface afford evidence that the plough has succeeded the sword, although it is clear that its dominion in these arid wastes is anything but prosperous. There—a guide, one of those who helped to bury the dead when night closed upon the carnage, is wending his way up the hill. Let us hasten down to escape his loquacity. He will tell us a long rigmarole about the feats he witnessed that would make your hair stand up. A Waterloo guide is worse than the showman who exhibits Wellington mounted on a white horse, speaking through a trumpet till he is hoarse.

The village of Waterloo should not be passed over. It gave its name to the battle. A poor, straggling, dirty village is this same village of Waterloo; but as we could not know that without coming to see it, so it is worth coming to see for the sake of ascertaining what sort of place it is. The church has a tone of bleak romance, which, in so very rustic a church, is not easily described. Upon the walls in the interior a number of tablets record the names of scores of English and French officers and soldiers, whose fall was thus affectionately commemorated by their kindred and their surviving brothers in arms. But tributes like these lose their interest in their accumulation, and we turn away oppressed and palled with endless catalogues of names which these mural tokens only help to mass into oblivion.

Passing from the church and its sad memories, we come to a monument which is at least singular in its purpose, and which deserves to be distinguished for its strange union of the ludicrous and the tragical. It was a thought worthy of Cervantes to build a tomb to the glory of the

Marquis of Anglesey's leg. In a cottage close to the church the Marquis's leg was cut off by Surgeon O'Brien (let the operator go down to posterity together with the hero who was operated upon); and the said leg, being no common leg, was awarded the rites of Christian burial, and, with due ceremony, deposited in the dusty little garden, where a monument, bearing a pious inscription, was erected over its grave! The boot which once belonged to this leg is still kept on show here, and the coarse Titanesque woman who exhibits the place, does not scruple to relate extravagant legends of both leg and boot, for the delectation of the *gobe-mouche* English who flock here in crowds to visit them. Two advertisements over the tomb announce the astounding facts that the cottage was visited in 1821 by George IV. of England, and afterwards by the King and Princesses of Prussia; and the Titanesque show-woman gravely assures you that the Marquis of Anglesey himself, "with one foot in the grave," has, ever since the Battle of Waterloo, made an annual pilgrimage to gaze upon the tomb of his leg! Alas! for glory that perisheth thus in vanity. While Achilles in the Park makes Wellington a pigmy, the Marquis of Anglesey's toe points the moral of Waterloo!

A more recent visit to the field of battle discloses extensive changes. The plain is rapidly losing its original character. Picton's tree has been cut down by the ruthless farmer to whom the ground on which it stood belongs; and the forest of Soignie has been so cut away that the outline it presented at the time of the battle can no longer be recognised. The last vestiges of the wood are

vanishing from the face of the earth. It appears that the King of Holland, eager to turn his kingdom into cash as quickly as he could, sold the timber to the bank of Belgium, and the bank (which has since failed) sold it away in lots to divers purchasers. The fate of the forest, therefore, was to be cut down. Even the Duke of Wellington, who had a gift from the king of a thousand acres, sold his lot, so that at the present moment little more remains than a few clumps of white beech, like spectres haunting the green places of the ancient wood. The plain of Waterloo itself, too, is greatly altered. A large establishment for the manufacture of beet-root sugar casts its heavy shadow over the spot where the last crash of bayonets scattered the disordered retinue of Napoleon. Cottages have sprung up by the road side; the greater part of the field is now industriously cultivated, and small gardens, and enclosures filled with shrubs, have displaced that tone of desolation which formerly gave such a melancholy aspect to the scene.

The château of Hougomont alone retains its early characteristics. The ruin remains just as it was after the battle, making a reasonable allowance for the decay and patching of more than a quarter of a century. There is the orchard neglected and overgrown with rank grass and lusty weeds; the shattered walls, the mouldering chapel with the black marks of the fire still upon its crumbling sides, and a thousand names scrawled and daubed upwards even to its roof. Among the rest are the names of Southey, and Wordsworth, assuredly not written by themselves, but by some *attaché* of the House of Warren, 30, Strand, who has painted up their names in large letters, and apparently

in liquid blacking. There is one spot upon which Lord Byron actually wrote his name! but an English gentleman, taking advantage of the ignorance and facility of disposition of the poor woman who shows the place, cut out the plaster upon which the name was written, and carried it away with him to England; an act of sacrilege which, now that she has come to a proper sense of her loss, she regards with as much indignation as ever was visited upon the spoliation of the Elgin marbles. The outer walls of the château, enclosing the garden, retain traces of the shells poured in by the French from the little wood which looks so peaceful at a short distance; and the loop-holes through which our soldiers fired are still preserved. The antique wooden gateway may yet be seen in its original frailty, making the visitor wonder how two thousand five hundred men who were shut up in this confined space, with such insecure defences, could have stood a siege against an enemy whose numbers were so superior.

IX.

THE VALLEY OF THE MEUSE TO LIEGE.

A SHORT drive through some famous spots—Genappe, close to which Napoleon was nearly captured in his carriage by the Prussians, and Quatre Bras, where the battle was fought—carries us to Namur, a strong fortress, or fortified town, on a rock at the junction of the Sambre and the Meuse. Here you get the first glimpse of that picturesque valley which the Belgians delight in naming *La Petite Suisse.* If you arrive in the evening, make up your mind at ten o'clock to be a little stunned by the rusty ill-tempered chime of the bells, a horrid booming sound which announces the closing of the gates. From that moment you are shut up, like the starling, and may cry in vain to be let out till the morning trumpets from the bristling heights proclaim the re-opening of the gates. This feeling of imprisonment, or sense of mental suffocation, so exasperating to an Englishman, is one of the penalties you must pay for sleeping in a fortified town.

But you will have no other reason to regret your visit to Namur. The streets are clean and cheerful, notwithstanding the brooding shadows of the hill-fort above, and the perpetual tramp of soldiers; and a peep into the citadel is worth a day's journey. The fortifications,

capable of enclosing six thousand men, are said to be impregnable, and look as if they were. The *plateau* on the summit, broad enough to allow six hundred soldiers to form and manœuvre, commands a magnificent view of the Sambre and the Meuse and the Forest of Ardennes. The country all round is highly cultivated and picturesque, and amongst the immediate items of interest is the residence, close to the town, of a blind *avocat*, who has walled in his grounds for security. The notion of a blind man walling himself up out of sight, afforded special diversion to our party, who were in such high spirits from the bracing air and the charming scenery, as to be willing to be amused on the slightest pretext. The fortifications were shown to us by the daughter of the *concierge*, a young girl who bounded before us like an antelope up the steep ascent. She told us that a part of the building on the *plateau*, which forms the last level before you reach the summit, is dedicated to the purposes of an ophthalmic hospital, and that all the soldiers, in all parts of Belgium, whose eyes become in any way affected, are sent here to be cured. The doctor happening to be visiting the sick as we passed through, suggested to our communicative guide another scrap of information. She told us that the doctor is paid ten francs a day, and his adjutant five. The amount surprised us, as it is greater than is paid in England for similar services; but all military perquisites in Belgium take a high range.

There is little in the way of sight-seeing in Namur, except the Church of St. Loup, the only one worth the expenditure of half an hour. It is remarkable for the grandeur of its marble columns, and the carving of the

ceiling in stone, said to have been executed by a monk, who lay on his back on a scaffolding while he was performing the work, with glasses over his eyes to protect them from the dust which fell in showers at every scrape of his knife. The carving is bold and effective, but exhibits no great invention in the design.

The valley of the Meuse, through which you take your route to Liège, is so wild, varied, and secluded, and full of such unexpected turns and scenic surprises, as to make up abundantly for the short-coming of all the flat roads you have traversed to get into it. Land here is as cheap as it is luxuriant and picturesque. We passed a handsome château, romantically placed on the bank of the stream, and surrounded by a considerable extent of woods and pastures, the rent of which, with liberal rights of fishing, shooting, and hunting, with all other possible out-of-door pleasures, was only about 80*l.* per annum. A family of six or eight persons might live comfortably in this happy valley upon 300*l.* a year.

The best way to explore the beauties of the valley is to take your passage by the boat which slowly tracks the stream to Liège, when there is water enough to admit of the navigation. This mode of travelling, however, cannot be recommended to anybody whose love of scenery is not paramount to the love of ease and luxury; for in these boats you meet a very miscellaneous company, and are not always sure of having the most satisfactory accommodation. Approaching Liège in one of these boats, we took on board a young ecclesiastic who had been ordained only the day before, and whose exuberant enthusiasm, and frank impatience to begin his priestly office at once by proselytising

the English, afforded us infinite amusement. In his eagerness to convert us he displayed the entire machinery of spiritual seduction, unconscious of betraying his game, or believing himself, perhaps, to be so skilful a player that he could afford to show his cards. This raw recruit, and lively son of the Church, told us that the process of conversion was carried on through the influence of women; the whole social fabric was moulded by them; the souls of men were in their hands; they were more accessible than men to religious impressions; their natures were diviner; they were nearer to heaven, gentler, less liable to have their feelings hardened by mechanical reasoning; and, for his part, he always addressed himself to the women of a family, being quite sure that in gaining them he should find all the rest an easy conquest. Having delivered himself of a hundred rhapsodies of this kind, with an equally subtle principle, fresh from the Jesus' College, at the bottom of them all, he made many enquiries about our clergy, and appeared to enjoy amazingly the information we gave him on the subject; nor could he conceal the lofty pity, breaking out every now and then into a gush of laughter, with which he looked down upon the lives and habits of priests who were blended so intimately with the laity as to give hostages to society in the shape of children. But when he heard of the enormous incomes we pay to the higher orders of our clergy, his astonishment was unbounded, and he believed that he disposed of the matter finally and with the right sort of contempt, when, subsiding into a look of profound austerity, he observed that the riches of *his* church were not of this world!

Arriving at Liège in the evening, we went in the twilight to visit the church of St. Jacques, impatient to see the medallions, the portraits, stained glass, and gilding, of which we had read some flourishing accounts in the books of travellers; but, to our chagrin, we found the church in the hands of masons and bricklayers, who had been engaged in its repairs for the last six years. The gilding and the old painting had been whitewashed out, and it was only here and there, in little bits which had escaped spoliation, that we could trace a scrap of the original decorations. But the mullioned windows and Gothic arches of the nave, and the magnificent choir, that could neither be removed nor whitewashed, amply compensated for the disappointment. Close to the choir, and ascending to the gallery overlooking it, is a curious double stair-case, by which two persons, apparently taking opposite directions, ultimately meet upon the same platform; an architectural puzzle, reserved by the people who show the church as its crowning curiosity. Before we came away, we were requested to sign our names in a book which is kept for that purpose; and here we found a great number of English inscriptions, amongst them that of a popular authoress, who, somewhat superfluously, added to her signature "*femme auteur.*" This somewhat unnecessary description provoked a smile, and we thought that the lady would have done better to have trusted simply to her reputation.

The old palace of the prince bishops of Liège, familiar to the readers of "Quentin Durward," in the fanciful descriptions of Sir Walter Scott, is the lion of the town; but it is in such a ruinous and dilapidated condition as to

disappoint the expectations of the visitor. The square in the interior, which is said to have furnished the model of our Royal Exchange, is now a market for vegetables, and with its low Moorish architecture, its gloomy arcades, and its loitering and listless groups in picturesque dresses under sheds and awnings, it has something of an oriental character. All the markets of Liège acquire a pictorial interest from the peculiar costume of the *boitresse*, or

market-women, whose tall, flat baskets fitted closely to their backs, and piled up with a variety of commodities, contribute a striking effect to the scene.

If Ghent is the Manchester, Liège may be described as the Birmingham of Flanders. It is here that Mr. Cockerill's famous cannon-foundry and iron-works are established, and from this centre the rail-road system and steam-engineering of the whole country is supplied. Close at hand, also, are the extensive coal-mines which originally invited this enterprise, and whose proximity offers important facilities to its operations. The stranger is early

apprised of these dingy labours as he approaches the town, by the perpetual clouds of smoke in which it is buried; and when he enters, he has further evidence of the fact in the heavy atmosphere and coal-dust surface of the streets. But, notwithstanding these *désagrémens*, Liège is so charmingly situated, that we are easily reconciled to the mists of the interior by the exquisite scenery upon which we look out at every side. Liège is built on the rising grounds of a wide basin, formed by the junction of the valleys of the Ourt, the Meuse, and the Vesdre, and commands prospects so extensive and agreeable that, in spite of its din and smoke, it possesses attractions which no other Belgian city can boast of in an equal degree.

It must not be supposed that this prosperous and populous town is given up completely to the fabrication of guns and steam-engines, and the disembowelling of coal-mines. Literature, science, and art have also taken up their stand here, and carry on their tranquil pursuits on the verge of the thunder-clouds, opening upon the sunshine of the rich valleys. There is a capital university here; numerous professors in the various faculties deliver lectures to large classes; and amongst the permanent residents are to be found some of the most distinguished *savans*. The Liégois have the good taste to be proud of their celebrities, and to do honour to their memory by such simple tributes as they have paid to Grétry, the composer, whose bust may be seen in the open space of the Place Grétry, which is called after him.

X.

THE LITERATURE OF BELGIUM.

THE literature of Belgium dates from the Revolution. It is a growth of nineteen years. Before that time there might have been three or four authors, of whom, perhaps, one or two may yet survive; but they were merely a few scattered ears of corn springing up in a wide field—not numerous or rich enough to make a harvest. One of the most direct effects of the Revolution has been to produce a National Literature.

We must stop, however, to ask what is this National Literature? It is a vexed question, which to this hour agitates the *salons* of Belgium; and the answer requires us to enter into some explanation.

In the first instance it is necessary to observe that of the native Belgian authors some write in French, some in Flemish, and some in both French and Flemish. Those who write in French only, deny that there is any national literature. They say that to constitute a national literature there must be a national language, and that that cannot be called a Flemish literature which is written in French. On the other hand, those who write in Flemish, or both, maintain that so long as the subject is national

the literature is national, whatever the language may be in which it is written.

There are two races in the country—the Teutonic and the Gaulois. They have different views, different tastes, different manners, and different ideas, social and political. The one would desire, if there were a partition, to join Germany—the other France. But they have a common interest in the preservation of their independence, and this subdues the external expression of their differences. They concur in desiring a nationality, because their material interests are identified with it. These races do not mix. They have their own provinces to which they are confined. Thus, Liège, Namur, Hainault are French; —East and West Flanders, and Antwerp are Flemish;— Limbourg and Luxembourg (with the exception of the part resting upon France) are more German than French; while Brabant in the centre, and containing the capital, receives accessions from each, and is the neutral ground upon which all antagonisms are absorbed. The English reader will see at once from this map of differences how the question of a national literature really stands.

There cannot be said to exist in Belgium a literature of living manners. The reason is obvious enough. The living manners of Belgium are not special—they are not national. They have no distinctive traits; they are the manners of France, of Germany, more or less mixed and modified. What then has become of the Flemish characteristics in the provinces just stated to be strictly Flemish. They perished under the sway of Napoleon, who held the country in his hands for fifteen years, and made it French, by placing all the offices of authority in the

hands of Frenchmen. He left nothing Flemish behind but the spirit of nationality, which he could not extinguish; but he extinguished all its outward and visible signs. A traveller passing through these provinces might fancy himself in France, excepts that he hears now and then the guttural sounds of the Flemish language issuing from the lips of the peasantry; for it is amongst the lower orders the traditions of a country take their last refuge after new masters and foreign influences have banished them from the upper classes.

But the national literature, although it represents no living manners, depicts with earnestness and fidelity the manners of the past. It is essentially historical. It revives all the traditions of the country. The Flemish writers in this respect display a marked contrast to those who write in French. They seek to restore the old pride and pomp of the early times—they bring back the old customs, forms, and institutions—they recall the old burghers, the lusty merchants, the gallant knights, and the citizen chivalry—they paint in detail, and show you, like Ostade and Teniers, the *vie intérieure* of the old people. The French writers on the contrary, although equally national in their subjects, deal only in generalities, and impart even to their generalities something of the modern *finesse* of French literature. They write Flemish romances as foreigners might be expected to write them from the study of books, but without the inspiration or gusto of the national spirit.

It is an honourable characteristic of the Belgian authors that, whatever may be the special tendencies of their genius, they have all devoted a large portion of their

labours to the illustration of the history and antiquities of their country. The universality of their productions is also remarkable. Not one Belgian author has confined himself to works of fiction. On the other hand, there is scarcely a single writer of eminence in any of the higher departments of history or philosophy, who has not written romances or novels founded on the local chronicles. There is no author-craft in Belgium. Literature has not yet acquired a sufficient extension to be cultivated as a profession. With a few unimportant exceptions, all the authors enjoy appointments under government. A few of the most distinguished may be enumerated: Baron de Rieffenberg (history, romances, poetry) is Keeper of the Royal Library at Brussels; Baron St. Genois (history, novels) is Professor and Keeper of the Library of the University at Ghent; H. Conscience (some of whose works are known to the English reader) is Secretary to the Society of Fine Arts at Antwerp; Sirat (author of the "History of Painting," of novels, poetry, and dramas) is one of the Chefs de Bureau of the Minister of the Interior; Moke (history, novels, legends) is Director of the Athénée Royale at Ghent; and Van Hesselt (equally distinguished by the variety of his productions) is Inspector of Schools. The emoluments arising from these appointments (voluntarily bestowed by the government as a reward and encouragement to men of letters) vary from 150*l.* to 300*l.* per annum, affording incomes quite large enough for the inexpensive habits of the country.

Birth, connection, and personal influence do not possess here the same weight which attaches to them elsewhere. A man of genius may make his way in Belgium to the

highest position in spite of all difficulties. The difficulties he encounters, however, are neither so serious nor so numerous as those which embarrass the course of unfriended talent in England. There are no class prejudices to overcome in Belgium. The son of the poorest artisan may obtain an elevated station, and keep it, without any of the jealousies or petty obstructions which would harass him in this country. The most favourable opportunities are thrown open to the people at large by the extension and cheapness of education,—a luxury which the humblest may command according to their circumstances. A poor man may send his son to the colleges, and advance him to any of the professions, at an outlay of 5*l.* or 6*l.* per annum; and if his son be a clever fellow, there is nothing to prevent him from attaining the highest eminence. Conscience, the most popular of the living authors, served as a common soldier; and Delhoungne, a distinguished member of the Lower Chamber, and who is likely one day to be minister, is the son of a struggling man who kept an old book-stall in Ghent. Numerous instances of a similar kind might be cited.

The Belgians boast of an old Flemish literature, which is not taken into account here, because it belongs to a remote period, and is, to all intents and purposes, a dead letter. In common with the people of most other countries, they assert a title to the cultivation of learning at an earlier date than their neighbours, and refer to many works of high erudition which were produced even so far back as the ninth and tenth centuries. They claim the famous fable of the "Knights of the Swan," as being originally of Flemish origin, and the celebrated "Roman

du Renard," which a recent author has been at great pains to prove was written in Flanders by a Fleming. They also ascribe the invention of the first newspaper (commonly attributed to the physician Renaudot, the editor of a periodical sheet called the *Gazette*, published in the reign of Louis XIV.) to a printer of Antwerp, who, in 1550, issued a Flemish journal under the name of the *Courante*, which contained political articles, literary and commercial advertisements, and lists of shipping. The first collection of voyages to India, and the first idea of the art of verifying dates, likewise enter into the catalogue of Flemish achievements.* But that old literature seems to have reached its height in the seventeenth century, which is regarded as its golden age; and from that time till the stirring days of the Revolution its existence was indicated only by faint and scanty rays.

* "La Belgique, illustrée par les Sciences, les Arts, et les Lettres. Par Octave Delepierre,"—a valuable epitome of topics connected with the industry and arts of the country.

XI.

THE VALLEY OF THE OURT.

Let us start from Liège in our old-fashioned post-chaise, rather than by the railroad, that we may linger as we list amidst this enchanting scenery.

It is the valley of the Ourt, and the road lies on the banks of the stream. The river traverses in this place one of the most charming ravines in the world, full of abrupt turns, mazes of foliage, cottages, rustic bridges, and picturesque mills twirling like gossamer wings in the air against the dark background of wooded hills. In one spot there is a burst of a far-off landscape, opening upon us suddenly, like a sylvan panorama conjured up out of the earth as we pass along; in another, a vast amphitheatre of forest-trees surrounding us on all sides, and dotted with churches whose white spires, octagonal towers, and golden crosses, gleam out through the rich green leaves; again, we catch in the distance before us a perspective of the road winding through an avenue of lofty elms, until it is lost in the depths of the remote defile which the sun has no power to illuminate.

See! there comes slowly down that slight declivity a market-woman,—her basket of twisted reeds, with its fantastic embroidery of coloured cottons, is raised on her

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shoulders, and its snow-white covering conceals its contents, which are piled up far above her head; her mantle is of scarlet cloth, a light kerchief folded across her forehead, and ascending conically, falls down at either side, waving, as the breeze flutters it, across her arms. Even from this spot her *sabots* are visible, terminating with a mellow light the deep-blue stocking which peeps under a gown chequered with various hues. The figure is somewhat grotesque, according to our notions; but observe how harmoniously the colours tone in with the dead

clouds of shadow at each side and behind her, and the dusty track of road which falls off into the thicket, giving distinctness to the perspective by defining the distance which lies beyond this sheet of sunshine at our feet.

Here is a wine-house by the road side. The lattice-windows receive the thick grapes from the house-vine, which looks as if it were eager to drop its lusciousness into the wicker framework. A sign swings in the wind, and a bush has taken root in the fissures of the old *cabaret*. The post-chaise stops at the door, which the ill-roped horses seem to know by habit. What vision is that which moves out through the doorway? How beautiful the figure, and picturesque the dress! Her hair is simply drawn over her forehead, and folded back beneath the cap of gauze, so light, transparent, and flexile, that it appears scarcely strong enough to restrain within its slender net that cluster of silken hair which is elaborately plaited into two divisions behind, and falls down in lessening threads, that sweep her rich bodice below the waist. The dress has a tinge of the old times in it, and its lively colours heighten the quaintness of its form. The bodice terminates in an angle, studded with a blaze of new-born roses, and the gown of thin silk, prankt with lace, falls in an hundred folds over ankles so fragile that they are worthy of sparkling in the painted chambers of Versailles. A rustic basket of delicate rushes hangs from her arm; it glows with grapes that bubble over the brim; in one hand she carries a goblet filled with some refreshing beverage for the postilion, and in the other—a letter. She springs forward with her offerings; a blush mounts to her cheek as she hands her letter, with a request that it may be

safely delivered. She looks as if she had something more to say; but her eyes and her lips laugh for a moment, and she flies back to her retreat behind the vines, probably to sit down in her own room, rock herself upon her chair, look in her glass, and think of many things confusedly, until she hears some shrill voice calling her name,—when she will start from her reverie, and wonder what an idler she has been.

The carriage sweeps along the road with velocity. As you whirl past you catch and miss innumerable peeps into the woods, and sprinklings of little cottages, which look as if they were asleep in the leafy recesses. Across the river, where the view widens, there is a pretty stretch of lawn, crowned with a house—a large house, with great chimneys, crowded windows, a glistening roof, and a lordly portico. That is a château—a veritable château of Belgium. You perceive how much they have made of that stretch of greensward. Cypress and fir-trees are dropped here and there, to oppose the brilliant surface of the grass, which is interrupted at intervals with beds of gorgeous flowers, that spring out of its fertile bosom. A coppice of close underwood makes one part of it look as if it extended to an interminable distance, and the coiling of the paths round and round the clusters of trees, shrubs, and flowers, and through the beds, and away to the right and the left till they encircle the château itself, and embrace points which are shut out from sight, and the starting up of various statues, singly and in groups, and urns and effigies, through the foliage, tempting the imagination into a thousand conceits, give to the whole a breadth and life which, however we may dispute about points of taste, is singularly

striking and agreeable. In that window which is just opened you see a head—such a head as Hesper might have been proud of, with its serene smile and languid expression. An arm rests upon the marble slab, and is apparently pointing to some object in the grounds. Over the head is thrown a veil, which at this distance looks like a floating vapour, and makes that noble beauty resemble an embodied star gazing down upon the earth from its "robe of clouds."

Perhaps these little traits of foreign life owe something of the charm to their novelty. The strange is more suggestive than the familiar. But are they not also more poetical than the incidents of our home pictures? We have cottages in England concealed in roses—handsome mansions rising on knolls belted with forest-trees—picturesque hedges, stiles, and sheep-tracks—mountain streams bounding through briars and rocky dells; yet, charming as they are in their luxuriant softness, they lack that embellishment of colour, and costume, and fanciful artifice which impart such a peculiar character to continental scenes. Our peasantry, to say the best of them, are bad figures in a landscape; and the formal taste of our architects and tailors is not well calculated to assist the imagination.

XII.

THE VALLEY OF THE VESDRE TO SPA.

THE prettiest resting-place *en route* in the Valley of the Vesdre is Chaud-Fontaine, a tiny village amongst the trees, clasping the base of the mountains, and looking out upon the river. Formerly this spot was so still and secluded that it was exactly the sort of solitude a lover would yearn for in the first sweet moments of monopolising devotion; but since the establishment of the railroad in these valleys, and the erection of a station exactly opposite the hotel, the sentimental repose of Chaud-Fontaine has been terribly invaded. The Liégois run down here on Sundays and holidays, smoking and rioting through the mazes of the hills to the utter disturbance of the tranquillity of the place; yet, notwithstanding these occasional invasions, the village, from its sequestered situation, offers singular attractions to invalids and people who seek a few weeks' retirement from the crowded thoroughfare of society.

The thermal waters for which Chaud-Fontaine is celebrated, and which, curiously enough, have their source in an island of the Vesdre whose springs are cold in all seasons of the year, possess highly beneficial qualities, especially in cases of gout and rheumatism. I venture to

state this from personal observation, and the reports of individuals who have tested the efficacy of the baths. The mode of life also contributes something to the curative process. There are no amusements or social resources of any kind to distract the attention. The visitor, in fact, has nothing to do but to idle and wander about all day, making excursions up the valleys and over the mountains as a resource against *ennui*. But he is unconsciously acquiring health all the while, enjoying a temperate climate, and delightful scenery, and laying up a stock of strength and animal spirits which will last him for a long time to come. The village consists of a mere handful of houses, of which the hotel, *par excellence*, is the principal. There is a post-office and an imitation of a *café*, with an impracticable billiard-table; a second, or inferior, hotel, and optical illusions of granaries and cottages stretching away through shadowy orchards, and pleasantly deceiving you into a notion that you are surrounded by a rural population.

The manner of living at the hotel puts you perfectly at your ease. A fixed charge of a few francs a-day includes all expenses, and for a small addition you may dine in your own apartments; but most people prefer the *table d'hôte*, glad, perhaps, to avail themselves of the opportunity it opens to them once in the twenty-four hours of looking on the "human face divine," albeit the divinity is sometimes rather motley. There are large airy rooms to loiter in all day long, a spacious lounge at the back under lofty trees with a swing in them, a rivulet at the foot of the hills crossed by a wooden bridge, and such a world of shade and dark walks and recesses, that it will go hard

with you if you do not contrive to fill up the wasting hours with a phantasmagoria of speculations and solitary adventurers.

The *table d'hôte,* as usual, has its sprinkling of English, whose criticisms upon the primitive style of the entertainment make an amusing variety in the sleepy routine. Amongst some English whom I met here once, there was a gentleman who exemplified the national foible in a remarkable manner. He had a starched and *parvenu* air, wore his red hair in bristles starting out of his head, a very stiff white cravat, a gaudily coloured waistcoat, and a blue dress coat. He evidently took particular pains to dress for dinner (which made him "the observed of all observers"), but the more he dressed the worse he looked. Upon the strength of this show of toilet, he took upon himself the office of sitting in judgment upon the dishes for the benefit of all new-comers. His observations were addressed to his wife, in a stage whisper intended for every body to hear; and the lady, shrinking at his side, and evidently afraid to remonstrate, submitted to the vulgar infliction with a gentleness which produced a feeling of sympathy for her situation, not very flattering to her husband.

His criticism ran on in this way, intermitted at every mouthful. "Horrible place this; wonder any one stays a day in it," [at this time he had been living here three weeks, apparently for the sole gratification of snarling at the *table d'hôte*]; "the same dinner every day! such a dinner to put before gentlemen. Soup?—water with hay chopped in it. Beef?—leather. Cotelette?—pork, mutton, veal, all the same, only they call it every day by

different names. Can't touch any of them: would as soon think of eating my hat! One is starved here: nothing to eat. Poulet? bah! Jambon? gross imposition; as much ham as I'm ham. Just look at the dessert! do you call that a dessert? The thing is shameful, and ought to be exposed. Plums? sloes. Cherries? poison-berries. It turns one's stomach. Nothing to eat. The wine is a pint of vinegar to half a pint of red ink; a regular take in. Mustard? oh! ah! Salt and pepper? filth. No spoons—no salt-cellars—nothing. And that fellow, the *maître d'hôtel,* having the insolence to sit every day at the table, carving everything with the same knife and fork, and cutting up everything in a dish, and sending it round. It's always stone cold before it comes to me. I hate the fellow. It's perfectly disgusting. Here we are, paying our money, taken in and done for. It's astonishing how the English allow themselves to be humbugged. It's all English money, you know, that supports these places. But the humbug must be exposed. The moment I get home I'll write to the *Times.*"

During these observations, ejected in the intervals of eating and drinking (for which the speaker displayed a large capacity), the lady, who knew better, or, perhaps, only felt better, would look round timidly every now and then, hoping that nobody overheard them. Her mild eyes would wander in this way under their dark pensive lashes, with an expression of shame in them, from face to face in her immediate vicinity, and when she discovered somebody else's eyes fixed upon her with a look of somewhat serious admiration (for she was pretty and delicate, and so unlike the uncouth growler beside her as to recall

the story of "Beauty and the Beast"), her lids would fall, and a slight colour would fly into her cheek and as suddenly retreat. It would be easy to guess how this union ended in the long run, if Beast continued much longer on his travels, bringing Beauty to *table d'hôtes*, and forcing into her eyes the blushes that refused to stay in her cheeks.

Pursuing the course of the Vesdre to Pepinsterre, we take the high-road to Spa.

Poor, pretty, gay, melancholy Spa! It is like a funeral festivity at which people make merry over the dead. The glory of Spa has long since gone by. Sir Francis Head gave it the finishing blow—the last knock on the head. All the world used to go to Spa formerly; all the world goes now to Nassau, where they have already added a new brünnen to the old list, or to Kissengen or Graefenberg. Spa, that once attracted the whole fashion of Europe, is now merely the spectre of its ancient self; retaining the outlines of its old charms, its air of elegance and jaunty grace, as far as a skeleton can be supposed to represent the brightness and vivacity of youth. Spa still has its visitors from different countries, but only just enough to indicate its decline. The famous Redoubt is still here, but it is almost empty. The promenades are still preserved, but the crowds that once animated them are gone. The change is striking, looking back upon what Spa once was. A hundred years ago, all diseases, from the spleen upwards, were sent to Spa. The grand tour was nothing if it did not include Spa. The education of a gentleman of high breeding was unfinished, if he had not visited Spa. All the crowned heads of Europe made pilgrimages to Spa.

Peter the Great derived so much benefit from the waters that he built a pump-room and a colonnade over the Pouhon spring in testimony of his gratitude. The Duchess of Orleans, wife of Egalité, in like manner erected a little souvenir, which, being destroyed in course of time, was replaced by Louis-Philippe. Spa was the rendezvous of kings and ministers—the only rendezvous where conflicting interests met on a neutral ground. All the old comedies abounded in pleasant allusions to Spa, which was as essential to the fashionable life of the day as Epsom or Tunbridge at home. There is nothing of all this left but the name.

The Redoubt still attracts the people who come here, but there is scarcely any play. The *café* is empty; the billiard-room, no longer filled with loungers, is thrown open to idlers from the workshops. The Promenade de Sept Heures collects only a thin gathering on the evenings, when an indifferent orchestra works hard to draw an audience. As long as the music furnishes an excuse for sitting in the open air, or lingering under the trees, the promenaders remain; but the moment the music ceases, everybody disappears. While the promenade lasts, you see specimens of costumes of all nations—Russian, Austrian, French, Bavarian, English, Belgian, in knots or groups, seated or moving through the dusky walks. All this is well enough, and not wanting in a certain sort of melodramatic interest. As the evening is fading, and the shadows are falling fast, and the mountains aud the darkness are shutting in upon the scene, and there is hardly a glimmer of light except from a few flickering candles round the music-stands, you can fancy any wild romantic

incident you please—a meeting of lovers, who dare not greet each other in the open day—a meeting of deadly foes—a blow in the dark—an assassination. This promenade is exactly the spot for the tragic business of an Adelphi drama. It is full of fine, dark, mysterious effects, which a writer of that class, aided by a grand pencil, would make great things of. The walk is broad, and runs at the foot of thickly-wooded mountains, which form a part of the Ardennes chain. Lofty trees are closely planted at each side, and, meeting at a great height overhead, shut out the heat and nearly the light. Consequently night sets in here sooner than in the streets or the open country; and here it is the fashion for everybody to walk, especially in the evenings, when the music plays; the promenade commencing at seven o'clock, from which circumstance it derives its name. About nine o'clock they disperse, some for the theatre, some for the *café*, some for home, but most for the Redoubt. In a moment all is gloom and total silence, except where a solitary foot-fall interrupts the low murmur of the woods, and, echoing through the walks, gives a hint that some stragglers still linger in the distance. And now it is that the real romance of the Promenade de Sept Heures begins. But the actors in the romance are all in darkness, where we beg to leave them.

XIII.

A GLANCE AT HOLLAND AND THE DUTCH.

HOLLAND is, in one aspect, the most interesting country in Europe. Its interest consists in the complete absence of every feature of natural beauty, and of every natural resource that confers interest upon other countries. It derives its attraction exclusively from its unlikeness to all other inhabited places on the face of the globe, and from the extraordinary proofs it affords of the power of man to subdue the elements to his use by the exercise of patient industry and sagacious forethought.

There is no country which so remarkably illustrates the practicability of vanquishing natural difficulties by the simple application of intelligence and perseverance. And here again Holland presents an extraordinary contrast to other countries. The difficulties which the Dutch have vanquished are of a kind that rarely exist elsewhere, and never except in so limited a degree as to be easily overcome. Nor is this all. In Holland, the conquest of these difficulties not only constitutes the entire foundation of the kingdom, and the prevention of their recurrence the perpetual business of the State; but they have been conquered, and are kept down, without any of those helps and expedients which exist elsewhere, and by the aid of which the

subjugation of such obstacles is rendered less a work of ingenuity than toil. In all other countries where drainage is necessary, or where embankments are to be formed, quarries, mines, and forests abound to furnish the requisite instruments and materials for the hands of labour: in Holland, no such resources exist. There is not a single quarry, mine, or forest in the whole country.

It is in this point of view that Holland appears almost incomprehensible. Without stones to build houses, walls, or ramparts, or to make roads; without iron to fabricate the necessary implements; without any of the minerals which enter into the ordinary operations of industry, the Dutch have produced results greater both in extent and in the marvellous disproportion between the means and the end, than all the countries of the civilised world. They have literally effected by the naked labour of their hands, that upon which the most skilful appliances of art have elsewhere been concentrated frequently in vain. The mere conception is gigantic; the performance prodigious; the issue incredible. It must be seen to be understood. No description can convey the slightest notion of the way in which Holland has been gathered, particle by particle, out of the waste of waters, of the strange aspect of the country, and the incessant vigilance and wondrous precautions by which it is preserved. Holland is, in the fullest sense, an alluvion of the sea. It consists of mud and sand rescued from the ocean, and banked up on all sides. Produced by the most dexterous and indefatigable exertions, it can be maintained only by artificial means. If the efforts by which it was redeemed from the waters were to be relaxed, the ocean would reassert its rights, and the whole king-

dom would be submerged. The slightest accident might sweep Holland into the deep. It was once nearly undermined by an insect. Indeed, the necessity of destroying insects is so urgent, that the stork, a great feeder upon them, is actually held in veneration, and almost every species of bird is religiously protected from injury. Bird-nesting is strictly prohibited by law. The drift of all this is palpable enough. But it is curious that the very existence of a great country should depend upon such guarantees.

How the people live here is a matter of endless speculation. Yet they not only live, but exhibit the activity of a hive. Their industry is above and beyond all praise. They possess a variety of manufactures, have within themselves many secrets of handicraft unknown to other countries, were amongst the earliest navigators (a business in which, considering their origin, it is not very surprising they should excel), were once a formidable maritime power, and are still a great mercantile community.

The country thus rescued from the sea is preserved by expedients almost as marvellous as its origin. It is intersected all over with canals and ditches, and bound up in flood-gates and wicker-work. The people, as Butler says, live at anchor. A Dutch landscape is one of the oddest things in the world. It is not a landscape, it is composed of streaks of land and water. A *luist*, or pleasure-house, answering to the retreat which we call a country-house, is a gaudily painted building, with a dismal attempt at *summeriness*, which, looking at the surrounding marshes, and thinking of the eternal dampness of the atmosphere, has rather a drenching effect upon the imagination, in spite of

its green verandahs and white steps, its shaven lawn and parterres of flowers. The lawn is generally separated from the public road by a ditch, crossed by a wooden drawbridge and gateway, over which the owner, according to his fancy, places some such fantastical inscription as "Sans Souci," a sort of pleasant fiction to take the eyes of the passer-by. Upon the edge of these trim lawns you invariably see a *thee ruim*, or tea-room, built of wood, pierced on all sides by gay flaunting windows, and pushed out over the water of the boundary drain, as if the inhabitants were not satisfied with the oozing moisture of the soil, but must needs absorb all the additional vapour and effluvia they can collect out of their ditches. This is a most painful stretch after the picturesque, a doleful effort to make up by stratagem for the deficiencies of nature. If the water were running water—a rill or a "babbling brook"—it would be another affair; but, alas! it is stagnant, mantled over with eternal green, and as dreary to gaze upon as it is pestiferous to inhale. A strange sight it is to see a Dutch family sitting at tea at these open windows in a wet atmosphere, looking perfectly happy in their own lumpish way, while they are drinking in death from the heavy evening air, loaded with ague, cramps, and malaria. Yet there they sit, sipping their tea and smoking their pipes, as happily as if they were in a bower of roses.

The energies of the people are concentrated against the common enemy. In the marshes which are below the level of the land, on the land which is below the level of the sea, and on the canals which are above the level of the land, we find windmills, and pumps, and steam machinery at incessant work to drain off the water and keep it out.

The profession of the water-engineer is the most important in the country. He receives a regular education for his business, and knows better than any man alive how to deal with flood-gates, dykes, and sluices, inundations, water-spouts, and tempests. A large corps of these professional guardians of the soil are kept constantly on the look-out for accidents, day and night, at an enormous expenditure to the government; and, in addition to their scientific aid, all persons, high and low, are required to repair instantly to the point of danger upon the ringing of an alarum bell, and to labour at the pumps, or perform such other service as the exigency of the occasion may require. The unremitting solicitude, in fact, of the whole population is directed to the appalling question of life or death, which is hourly and momentarily at issue between the people and the devouring ocean.

Their genius for practical paradox enables them to extract from this very grave terror a source of entertainment. In winter they are exposed to the utmost danger from the accumulation of large masses of ice which block up the rivers (if rivers they may be called), causing extensive inundations, and frequently damaging the protection dykes. The Dutch take out their revenge against this formidable foe in annual festivals. The famous lake of Haarlem, formed by the bursting of four previously independent lakes, is said to present a circumference of eleven leagues, and upon this surface, when it is frozen over in the winter time, multitudes of people collect for the purpose of holding a gala. Tents are pitched, and games of all sorts are carried on with uproarious merriment. The principal amusement is skating, in which the

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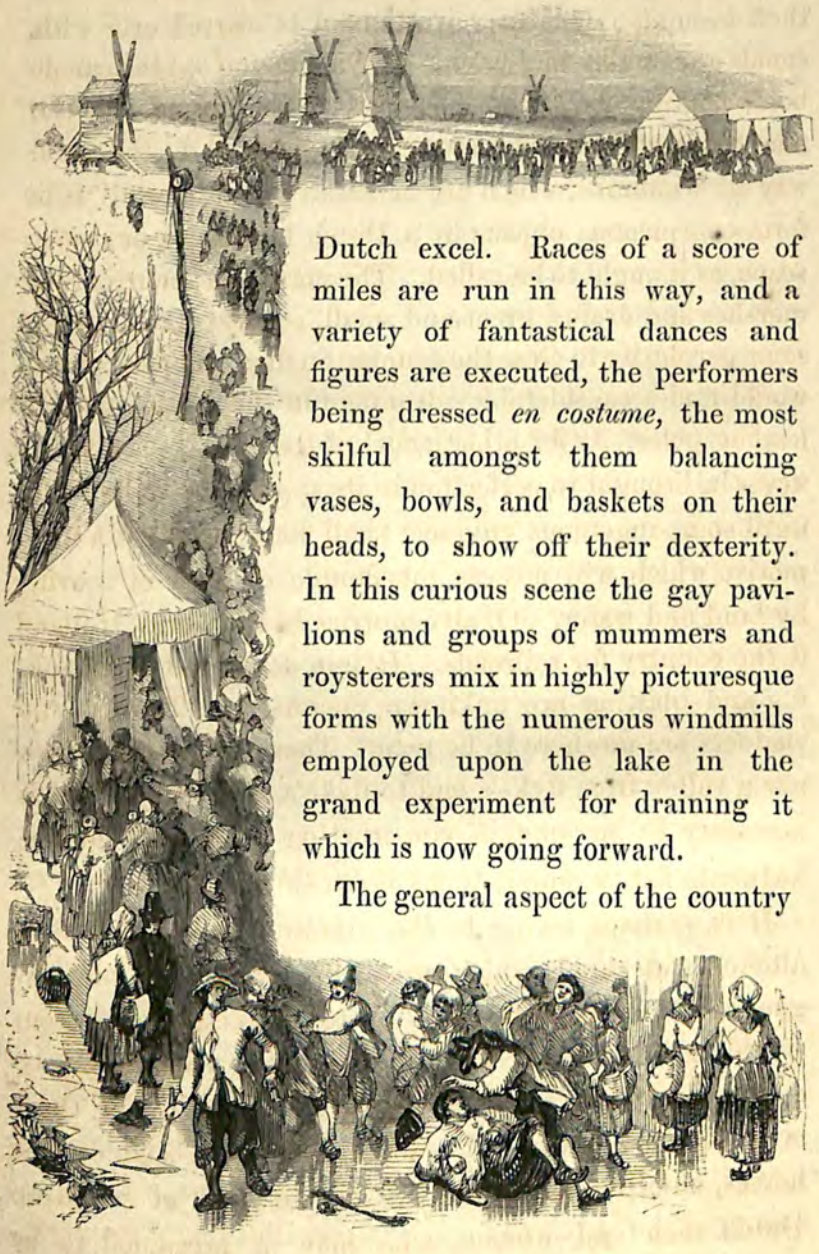

Dutch excel. Races of a score of miles are run in this way, and a variety of fantastical dances and figures are executed, the performers being dressed *en costume*, the most skilful amongst them balancing vases, bowls, and baskets on their heads, to show off their dexterity. In this curious scene the gay pavilions and groups of mummers and roysterers mix in highly picturesque forms with the numerous windmills employed upon the lake in the grand experiment for draining it which is now going forward.

The general aspect of the country

is sufficiently indicated by the physiognomy of the *luists* and their grounds. The face of Holland is scarred over with canals and drains, and as you drive along you see the canal-boats floating above you. The process of drainage in the marshes is effected by water-courses, worked in the usual way by windmills, which are necessarily so numerous as to form conspicuous objects in a Dutch landscape, or *water*-scape, as it ought to be called. The perpetual recurrence of marshes and drains, great and small, renders it a matter of some perplexity to cross the country on foot, and pedestrians would find a considerable advantage in the employment of leaping poles. As for other modes of travelling, science will never be brought to perfection in its application to Holland, until some ingenious engineer shall have invented a locomotive which will possess the double capacity of moving by land and water. Of all countries in the world, Holland is the country for railroads. It is a dead level; embanking and blasting are unknown operations. Tunnels and viaducts are nowhere to be seen. There is neither a rock nor a valley from dyke's end to dyke's end, and all that is necessary to be done in constructing a railroad on this fortunate flat, is simply to lay down the line.

It is, perhaps, owing to the infinite number of drains, ditches, and canals which cross your track, that no safeguard whatever is thought of to protect people from tumbling into them. Even in the streets, which might be appropriately described as canals with open quays, there is no such thing as a rail, wall, or fence to be seen, so that horses, children, and strangers, not to speak of grown-up Dutch men and women, who may be presumed to be amphibious, have no security whatever against being

drowned, or, more properly, suffocated in the mud. Yet we never hear of an accident of that kind. The danger is, in fact, so imminent, that it carries its own warning.

A Dutch city presents the appearance of a settlement raised upon a bog. Most of the houses topple forward, as if they were staggering from the subsidence of their foundations. One half of the East India Company's stores at Amsterdam has already sunk in this way, the piles on which the city is built having gradually given way in the course of time. But of its two hundred and twenty or thirty thousand inhabitants, probably, there is not one who entertains the slightest apprehension on the subject. They are much more troubled by the want of fresh water, for the luxury of a spring does not exist, and they are obliged to remedy the defect by conveying a supply from the Vecht in barges, and husbanding their rain-water in tanks.

The Dutch are great drinkers and smokers. They begin with drams and tobacco early in the morning, and continue their cigars all day long, having recourse again at intervals to the schiedam. The climate enforces these habits, from which it would be a mistake to infer that the people are intemperate. On the contrary, they are remarkably sober and moral. The small potations in which they so frequently indulge have no effect whatever beyond that of an artificial stimulant, rendered indispensable by the humid and depressing nature of the atmosphere. A German who had resided many years at Rotterdam told me, that he had for a long time resisted the temptation of the morning dram, until at last he found his appetite utterly gone, and was compelled, in self-

defence, to resort to a glass of the reviving Geneva. Even with the aid of that fugitive tonic, he never could manage to make a hearty breakfast in Holland, although he had lived there quite long enough to become thoroughly acclimated; but whenever he paid a visit to his native hills up the Rhine, his strength returned, and he could sit down to breakfast with rejuvenescent vigour.

The cleanliness of the Dutch is proverbial. Their houses,—of which those belonging to the wealthier classes are splendid and sumptuous,—may be described as models of neatness and order. The steps and doorways are as bright as porcelain, and every nook and cranny in the interior undergoes incessant processes of washing and dusting. The floors are polished like a table; the walls have not a speck or soil; no spider is suffered to weave his nets in dark corners; and the sweetness of the remotest recesses of cupboards may be confidently relied upon. Yet, with all this care applied to their houses, the Dutch are singularly indifferent to cleanliness in their persons. They certainly do not seem to employ the bath with much zeal, and they dress themselves as if the matter of freshness in the toilet was of little account. Perhaps the eternal fumes of tobacco, with which even their bright houses are saturated to the roof, may be held responsible for much of this apparent personal neglect.

This is not the only practical contradiction extant in Holland. The Dutch accomplish many things which are at variance with the experience of other places. In spite of the old saw, they build houses securely on sand, and have realised the kingly rebuke of Canute, by having successfully said to the sea, "Thus far shalt thou come,

and no farther." Nor is it the least of their achievements that they contrive to live comfortably, and become robust; and, after a manner, cheerful, in a climate which is pre-eminently calculated to lower the nervous system and destroy human life. They manage to live in this fat, contented way too, in spite of the want of some of the essential means of life. They have no water, no wood, no salt, no coal, no stone. They do without them, or supply them by such resources as art put to torture can suggest. They extract salt, for example, from the sea. Nor should it be forgotten amongst their triumphant appeals to the mysteries of nature that, without a soil, they produce the costliest and most beautiful flowers.

The old queer costume of the Dutch is passing away. The bulk of the people dress very much like the English, the vast balloon breeches, broad hat, and full petticoats, being now seldom seen except amongst the peasantry and the fishermen. The women in the market-places, especially the Friesland women, still retain their not unpicturesque head-dresses. The snow-white cap, plaited and frilled round the face, has a striking effect, when the wind, getting under it, ruffles it into a fluttering circle, resembling the rainbow frills which were in vogue in England in the reign of Elizabeth. The women of the lower classes wear also white muslin caps, sheathed with gold leaf or plates of gold paper, with high gilt pins standing up at each side, metal bands round the forehead, and a profusion of long ear-rings, and sparkling gold or brass ornaments, making a brilliant appearance on *fête* days and festivals.

The most remarkable of these *fêtes* is the annual *Kermesse,* which takes place in September, and lasts for several days. The scene at Amsterdam on this occasion has more of the character of a wild saturnalia than an ordinary festival. It is specially provided in the engagements of domestic servants in Amsterdam, that they shall enjoy the right of indulging themselves for three days during this *fête,* their masters exercising no power of control whatever over them during that interval, so that they are at liberty to run into any excesses they please. The consequence of this license in a city abounding in those wretched haunts of depravity called *speel-houses,* may be easily anticipated. The young women, some wearing short bed-gowns, fitting tightly to the body, others in long white muslin dresses, go out in crowds into the streets, and, according to an immemorial usage prevailing here, select their partners or lovers from the crowd, with whom, for the stipulated three days, they run through a course of mad excitement. It is impossible to convey an adequate idea of the aspect of the streets during this protracted revel. Canals, bordered by trees, occupy the middle of the streets. The communication from street to street is kept open by innumerable bridges, some of them apparently so fragile, that it is a wonder they do not break down under the hosts of feet which on these occasions trample over them in delirious confusion. Every speck through the trees and over the bridges is filled with a surging population. The tall and richly carved houses, with their mirrors standing out of the windows, and crowds of people gathered on the oblique steps observing the scene, furnish an effective

back-ground to the picture. The riot, acquiring additional force from intoxicating indulgences in the *speel-houses,* continues uninterruptedly night and day, except, perhaps, for a few hours towards morning, when it lulls into comparative quiet from downright exhaustion. The men and women form rings on the borders of the canals, and dance with the wild exultation of satyrs, then rush over the bridges to recommence their furious festivity in another quarter. Cat-calls and rattles, and other diverting noises, intermingled with practical jokes,

are introduced into the service; and as long as the physical energies of the multitude last, the city is literally given up to a carnival of the most outrageous hilarity and debauchery the civilised world has ever witnessed. When the animal spirits of the Dutch break out, it is indeed a sight to see. It can be compared only to a violent explosion of gas. This terrible *kermesse* is the one blot on the morality and decorum of Holland, but doubtless it operates as a vent for the passions and infirmities of the lower classes of Amsterdam, since, although much ruin is accomplished in the brief period of its existence, the city relapses for the rest of the year into its characteristic stillness and stagnation.

Looking back upon the general life of this singular people, it would be a curious problem to follow out the probable mental speculations of a Dutchman. Can he have any *amour patrie?* How does he know when he is away in Japan, or elsewhere, but that his country may have been engulphed by an inundation? It must always be a dubious matter with him to talk about his native land. He can never be sure that it is still in existence. Besides, it is not so much his native land as his native water. What a terrible tremor he must be in when he writes home to his wife, and directs his letter to the pleasant "Sans Souci" which it may never reach. With what nervous misgivings he must talk to strangers of the united family he left behind him, and of their affectionate anxiety about *his* safety! Then, again, what must be his amazement when he first travels and sees a mountain. What must he think of a running stream, or a torrent tumbling down an Alpine precipice? What must be his emotions,

and what the perplexities of his breathing apparatus, when he gets into the sunny south. How astonished he must be when, for the first time, he sees a clear horizon many leagues off, and gazes over a champaign dotted with towns and rural domains, in which every item is palpable and distinct. There are such strange things awaiting the senses and the imagination of a Dutchman in a foreign country, that he must surely think himself translated into another world.

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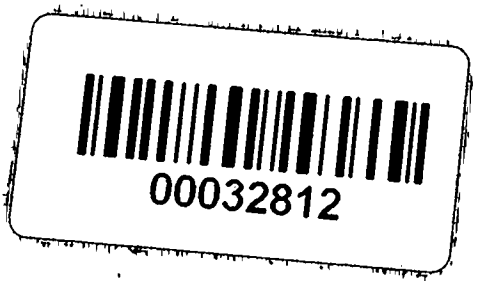
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